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“ THEY CALLED ACROSS MERRILY TO EACH OTHER ”

# A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

*by*

ONOTO WATANNA

ILLUSTRATED BY

L. W. ZIEGLER



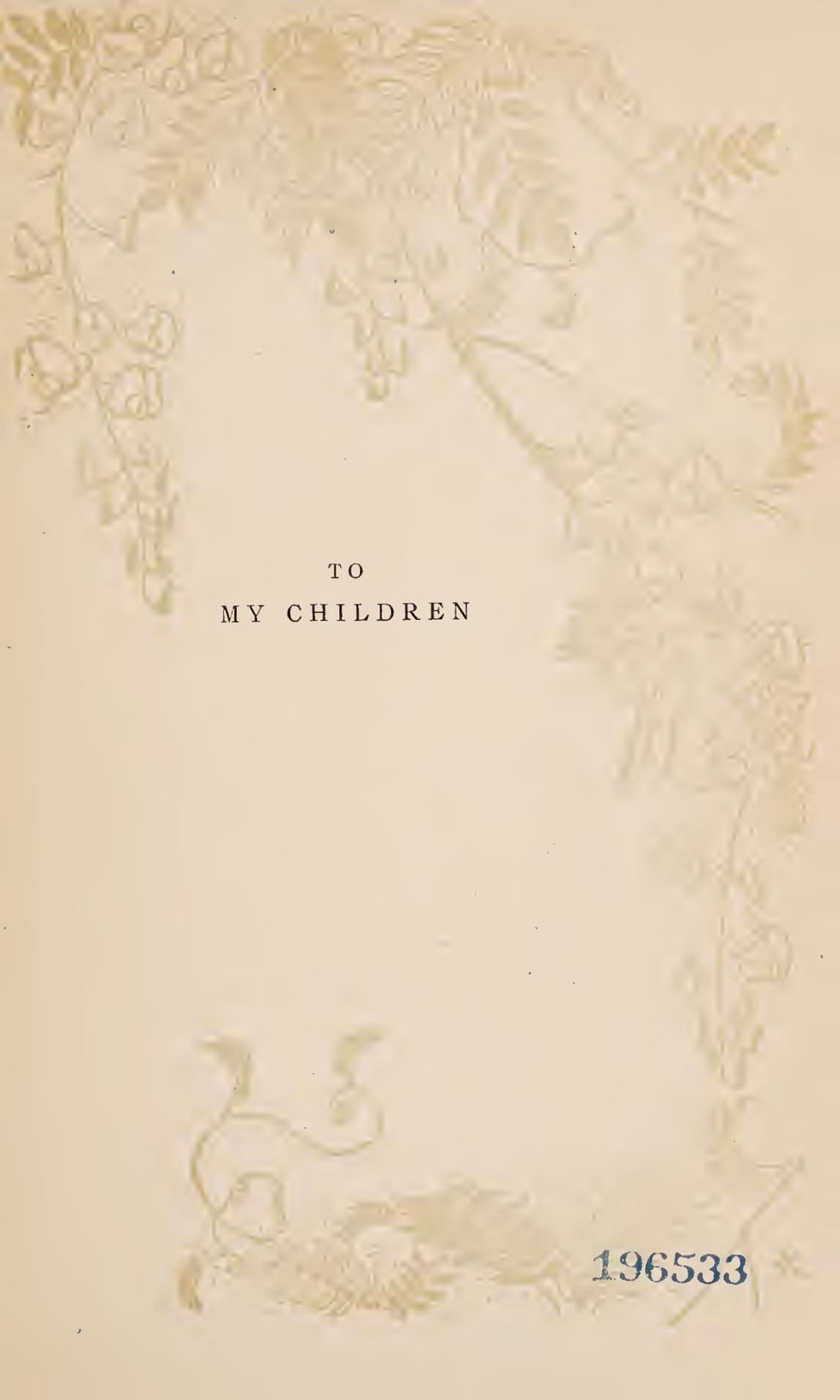
NEW YORK AND LONDON  
HARPER & BROTHERS  
PUBLISHERS M-C-M-V-I

PS 8503. A2 J3

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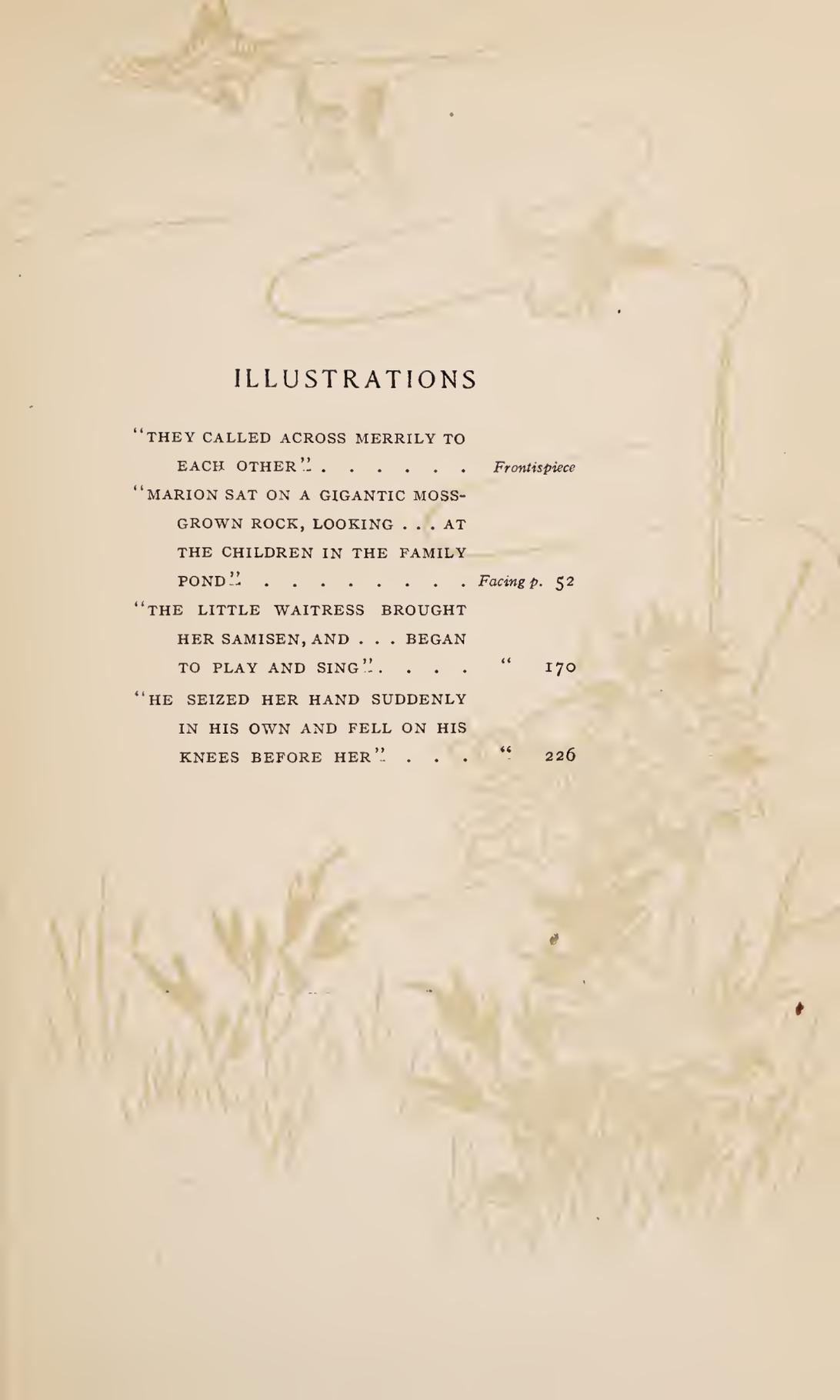
Published October, 1906.



TO  
MY CHILDREN

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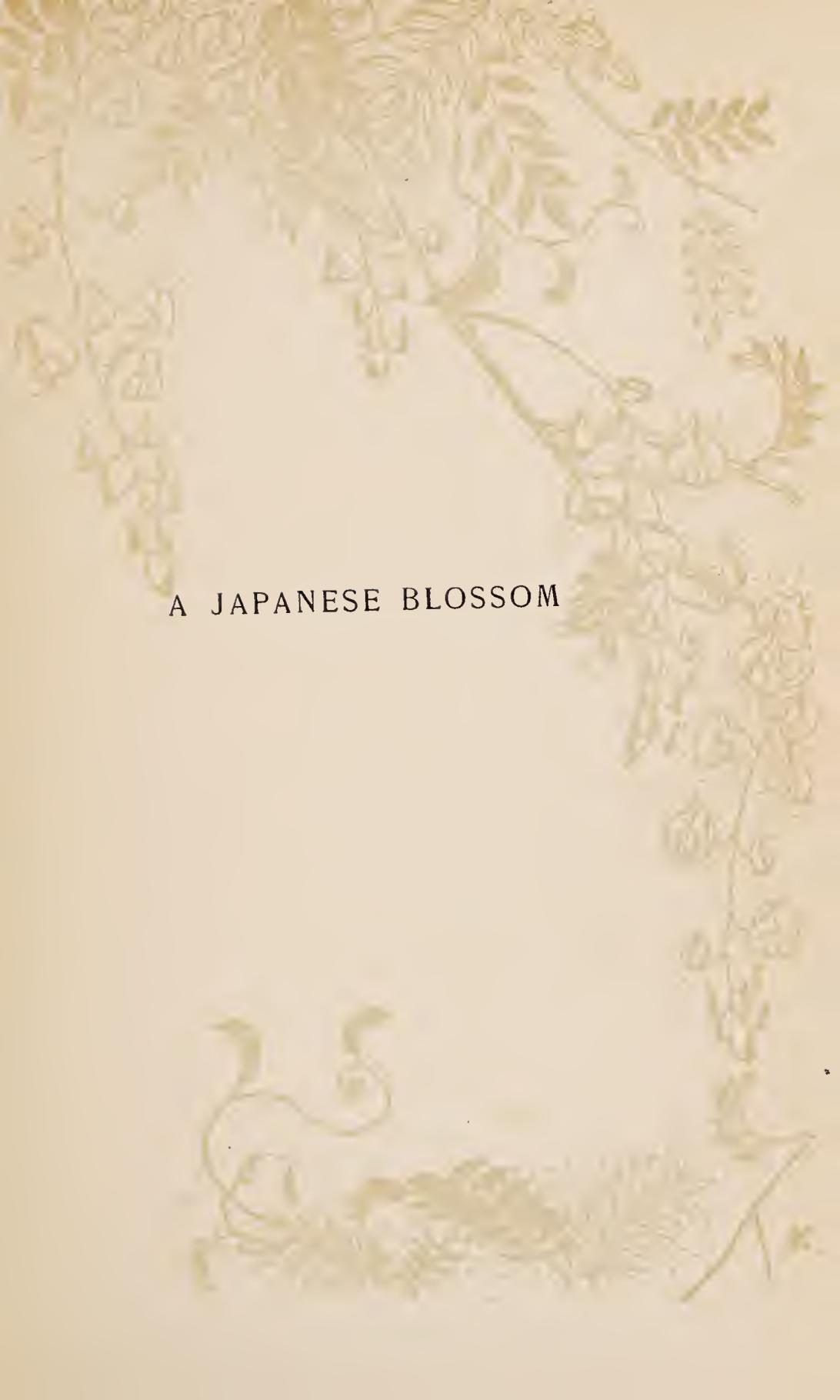




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### I

THE children sat in a little semi-circle about their grandmother, listening intently as she read to them the last letter from their father in America. Ever since they could remember, his business as a tea merchant had taken him away from Japan on long visits to the foreign countries. His latest absence had continued for three years now, and little Juji—born a short time after his departure—had never seen him.

As the grandmother finished the letter, the children instinctively looked

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first of all at Juji, sitting there in placid indifference, stolidly sucking his thumb. Juji had ceased to be the baby of the Kurukawa family. Afar off in America a new, strange baby had been born, and had taken the place of Juji, just as its mother one year before had taken the place of Juji's mother, who was dead.

When the old grandmother, with whom they made their home, had gently broken the news to the children that their father had taken a new wife from the daughters of America, she had impressed upon them the seriousness of their duty to their new parent. They must love her as a mother, revere her as their father's wife, remember her with their father in their prayers, and endeavor to learn those things which would be pleasing to her.

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Gozo, who was the eldest of the children—he was seventeen years of age—set his little brothers and sisters a bad example. He grew red with anger, allowing himself to be so overcome by his feelings that for a moment he could not speak. Finally, he snapped his fingers and said, as his eyes blazed:

“Very well. So my father has put a barbarian in my mother’s place. I cannot respect him. Therefore **I** cannot further obey him. *I* shall leave his house at once!”

At these revolutionary words, his old grandfather commanded him sternly to keep his place while he taught him a lesson.

“To whom,” asked the old man, “do you owe your existence, and therefore your first duty in life?”

The hot-headed boy, who for a number of years had had neither

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father nor mother to guide him, answered, immediately:

"To the Emperor I owe my existence and duty, sir. *He* comes even before my father. Therefore, in leaving my father's house to enter the service of Ten-shi-sama [the Mikado] I am but doing my highest duty."

The grandfather looked at the flushed face of the young boy.

"You will enlist?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are too young, my boy."

"I can pass for much older," said Gozo, proudly.

"You are but seventeen," said his grandfather, quietly.

The boy's heart heaved.

"Life would be unbearable here," said he, "with such a change in the family."

"Do not use such expressions before your young brothers and sisters,"

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said the grandfather, sternly. "You almost make me think you are unfit to be an elder brother."

At this Gozo winced and became pale. He had always been proud of his position as the young master of the family.

Then his grandmother spoke, and her words reached the heart of the boy.

"Be not rash, my Gozo. Our dearest daughter, your mother, would have been the first to urge you to filial thought for your father."

"Grandmother," cried the boy, "I can't bear—" He flung his hand across his eyes as though to hide the tears. Now all the children began to weep in sympathy with their big brother. Miss Summer, the daughter of their father's friend, set up a great wail, declaring between her sobs that never, never, never could

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she be induced to wash the feet or be the slave of a barbarian woman. For Summer, though but twelve years old, was some day to marry Gozo—so their fathers had said—and in Japan a daughter-in-law is under the command of the mother-in-law.

By patience and reasoning, the grandparents at last exacted from Gozo a promise that he would not leave home until his step-mother came to Japan. It was possible she might never come. Gozo, the proud and stubborn, sullenly gave the promise. During the months that followed, however, he seemed greatly changed in disposition. He became studious, quiet, given to gloomy moods, when he would lock himself up in his room and brood over what he considered the wrong and insult done to his mother's memory. He

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would have found it hard enough to bear if his father had married a Japanese woman, but the thought of an American mother overwhelmed him with dismay. He pictured to his young mind her influence upon his sisters Plum Blossom and Iris, twelve and eight years old respectively; in boyish indignation he saw her punishing his little ten-year-old brother Taro, who could not keep his face and hands clean nor keep his clothes whole. One night Gozo dreamed he saw his step-mother in the guise of a hated fox-woman soundly switching with a bamboo stick his little, fat, baby brother Juji. When he awoke in the middle of the night to find it only a dream, he got up from his couch, and, going to where Juji slept, carried him to his own bed. He held the little, warm body closely in his arms. Juji slept on,

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and snuggled down comfortably in his brother's arms for the rest of the night.

It was the following morning that the letter had come from America telling of the birth of the new baby. As if this news were not bad enough, the father, unconscious of the resentment he had awakened, announced his intention of returning at once to Japan with his wife, the new baby, and his two young step-children, for he had married a young American widow.

The children's faces wore a frightened expression as the grandmother read the letter aloud. Little Plum Blossom glanced stealthily at her brother; then suddenly, to the surprise of them all, she spoke up:

"Well," said she, "Daikoku [god of fortune] is good. He has given us another sister. *I* shall make him a great offering this year."

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Iris, who was a mere echo of her sister, ventured a little sing-song assent.

"I shall make a big offering, too."

Taro grinned apprehensively in the direction of his moody brother; then said, defiantly:

"As for me, *I* shall beat every single day of the honorable year that barbarian step-brother"; for there was a little step-brother of the same age as Taro, and the latter, boylike, longed to try his powers upon him.

Gozo ground his teeth together.

"The gods only know," said he, "what you poor little ones will do. As for me, I shall not be here to bow to the barbarian. My time has come. The Emperor needs me."

"Oh, please don't leave us, brother," said Iris, resting her face on his hand; "I shall die of fear if you are not here to help us defy her."

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"Children, hush!" cried the old grandmother. "Never did I dream I should hear such words from my children. Ah, had my beloved daughter lived, you little ones would have had more filial principles."

"It is not right to distress grandmother," said Plum Blossom, "and it is very wrong to speak evil of one we do not even know. I, for one, am going to—to—love the foreign devil!"

"So am I," sobbed Iris, still caressing Gozo's hand, "b-but I shall hate her if she drives our Gozo away!"

Gozo patted the little girl's head, but said nothing.

Meanwhile, little Juji's thumb had fallen from his mouth. For some time he had been watching in perplexed wonder the expressions upon the faces of his brothers and sisters. He could not decide in his small mind just what was troubling them

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all; but troubled they surely were. The weeping Iris had finally decided Juji. Plainly something was wrong. The baby's lower lip, unnoticed by any one, had gradually been swelling out. Suddenly a gasp escaped him, the next moment the room resounded with his cries. When Juji cried, it seemed as if the very house shook. Though not often given to these tempestuous storms, he seemed fairly convulsed when once started upon one. He would lie on his back on the floor, stiffened out. First he would hold his breath, then gasp, then roar. Juji's crying could never be stopped until a pail of water was thrown in the face of the enraged child. This time, however, he became the object of intense commiseration. The children felt that he had acquired somehow a sense of their common calamity.

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The screaming child was alternately hugged and petted and fanned, until finally, his fat little legs kicking out in every direction, he was carried from the room by Gozo. Out in the garden, the big brother ducked him in the family pond. Kind travellers in Japan have made the extraordinary statement that Japanese children never cry. Certainly they could never have heard Juji—and there are many Jujis in Japan, just as there are in every country.

Juji's crying fit broke up the little family council for that day, but he was the only member of the family who slept soundly that night.

The little girls cried softly together, as they whispered under the great padded coverlid of their bed. Taro was quite feverish in his imaginative battles with his step-brother.

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As for Gozo, he sat up all night long, gazing with melancholy eyes at the stars, thinking himself the most miserable being on the face of the earth. He, too, like Juji, needed a little pail of something dashed upon him, and soon he was to have it!

## II

“OH, dear, *how* I can ever bear this corset!”

Plum Blossom subsided in a little, breathless heap on the floor.

Early in the day both she and Iris had been dressed in their best—a plum-colored crêpe kimono for little Plum Blossom, and an iris-colored crêpe one for little Iris. Their hair had been carefully arranged in the pretty mode at this time fashionable for little girls in Japan. Flower ornaments glistened at the sides of the glossy coiffures. The grandmother had regarded them with pride when the maid brought them before her.

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"Certainly," said she, "your father and mother will be proud to see you."

"And *we* have a great surprise, too, for her," said Iris, her bright eyes dancing.

Plum Blossom put a plump little hand over her sister's mouth.

"Hush! Not even grandmother shall know yet."

Grandmother smiled knowingly.

"And now," said she, "can you say all the big English words—you remember?"

"Yes, yes," cried Iris, excitedly. At once she began to shout in her most sing-song voice:

"How de do! Ver' glad see you two days. Thanxs your healt' is good. Most honorable welcome at Japan. Pray seated be and egscuse the most unworthy house of my fadder."

Plum Blossom was chanting her

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welcome before Iris had quite finished.

“Mos’ glad you cum. Come agin. Happy see you. Come agin. Liddle girl, welcome for sister. Liddle boy, too. Nize bebbly! Please I will kees. So!”

She indicated the kiss by putting a little, open mouth against her sister’s cheek, leaving a wet spot behind. Iris wiped her cheek carefully with one of her paper handkerchiefs; then as carefully she repowdered the spot where her sister’s moist lips had rested.

Ever since their father had been in America, the family had been learning to speak English. Their teacher was a missionary priest, and now, at the end of three years, even the smallest child could speak the language, though imperfectly. In order to obtain fluency, they had

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made English the spoken language in the family. The speeches of welcome to the step-mother were composed by the grandmother; the children had learned them like parrots. Madame Sano tapped both of the little girls on the shoulder and caressed them. Clinging to each other's sleeves, off they tripped into the other room, where was the great "secret." The secret consisted of a few articles of American attire, which the little girls had induced a jinrikiman to bring them from Tokio. All of the money Gozo had left behind for them as his parting gift had been expended thus. How the boy's angry heart would have stormed had he known his little sisters had spent his gift for such a purpose!

Plum Blossom wore a corset outside her kimono. Some one had told her that this was the most important

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article of a barbarian woman's wardrobe, and the tighter it was the better. So the little Japanese girl had tied herself by the corset-string to a post. By dint of hard pulling she had managed to encase her plump form so tightly that she could scarcely breathe. Iris, with hands clad in large kid gloves, was drawing on a pair of number five shoes. Her feet were those of the average American child of seven or eight years. At this juncture Miss Summer (who being engaged to Gozo was always called "Miss" by the little girls) opened the shoji and thrust a flushed and excited face between the partitions. She was six months older than when she had wailed aloud her determination not to wash the feet of a barbarian mother-in-law, but she seemed as childish and silly as ever as she came tittering into the

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room, an enormous straw hat, from which dangled ribbons and bedraggled ostrich-feathers, upon her head. The sisters gasped in admiration, their eyes purple with envy and wonder. Only in pictures had they seen anything so gorgeous as that hat.

"Where did you get it?" inquired Plum Blossom, letting the corset out a bit by the simple method of breathing hard, hence snapping the fragile cord.

"Well," said Summer, confidentially, "I will tell you if you will never, never repeat it to my future husband."

"Gozo?"

Summer nodded. "Gozo hates much Otami Ichi," said Summer, with meaning.

Plum Blossom's scorn burst the last string of the corset. It slipped from her as she arose.

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"Hi," she said, "Otami Ichi! *He* says he is two years too young to be a soldier. He is older than Gozo. Did you take gifts from *him!*"

Summer giggled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why not? His honorable father keeps a fine foreign store in Tokio."

It was Plum Blossom's turn to shrug. She undid her obi and tied the corset to her with the sash.

"What do you suppose Taro has been doing?" said Iris.

"Something bad?"

"No, not bad exactly," said Plum Blossom, who disliked her future sister-in-law. "He has been learning jiu-jitsu."

It was Summer's turn to gasp, thus displacing her elaborate head-gear.

"What! A baby of ten learn jiu-jitsu?"

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"Eleven," corrected Plum Blossom. "His grandfather was samurai. Ver' well. That grandfather's friend teach him jiu-jitsu—a few trieks of jiu-jitsu."

"What for? Will he, too, fight the Russians?" inquired Miss Summer, sarcastically.

"N-no," said Plum Blossom, dubiously, "but he says he will fight *somebody*."

"And little Juji," put in Iris, "has a fine present for our dear mother."

"What is it?"

"A bag of peanuts!"

"That's nize. *How* can I keep this hat on. It falls off if I move."

"You must pin it on," suggested Plum Blossom, "for so the fashion-books say. There, take one of your hair-pins." She adjusted the hat back to front on Summer's head, and fixed it firmly in place with a long

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hair-dagger she took from the girl's coiffure.

Summer found a seat and began to fan herself languidly. "My sleeves feel very heavy to-day," said she.

"Why?"

"They are much weighted," declared Summer; "I carry in them five love-letters."

"Oh! Oh-h! From our Gozo? Why, has he already written to you, Summer?"

"I'll tell you a secret," said Summer, giggling. "No, you must not listen, Iris. You are too young." She whispered into Plum Blossom's ear. Suddenly the latter thrust out her little, plump hands.

"Go away. You are not good girl. Only my brother should write you love-letters!"

Plaintively Summer made a gesture of annoyance.

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"I must spend a lifetime with Gozo," said she. "Therefore, is it not better to have a little fun first of all?"

Iris cried out something in a very jeering voice. Summer pretended she did not hear.

"What is that?" cried her sister, excitedly.

"Oh, I know who wrote Summer's love-letters to her."

"Who did?"

"She wrote them herself."

"I did not."

"You did."

"I did *not!*"

"You did, for your cousin told me so."

"Oh, the wicked little fiend!"

"Young ladies," called a maid from below. "Come, come; come quickly. Your father is seen. The jinrikishas! Hurry! Your honor-

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able grandmother wishes you to be at the door to welcome him!"

In a panic the little girls rushed about the room, gathering up their various articles. Then, grasping each other's sleeves, they tripped down the stairs.

### III

WHILE the husband assisted the children and nurse to alight from the jinrikishas, Mrs. Kurukawa the second stood looking about her.

She was a little woman, possibly thirty-five years old. Her face was expressive, showing a somewhat shy and timid nature. Her large, brown eyes had a look of appeal in them as she turned them towards her husband. He smiled reassuringly and put an affectionate hand upon her arm. Immediately her momentary restraint and fear left her.

"Is this the famous Plum Blossom Avenue?" she asked, indicating the

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budding trees under which they now passed, and which served as an exquisite pathway through the garden.

"This is Plum Blossom Avenue," replied her husband, "and as you see, I keep my promise. You know I cabled to Japan to have the plum blossoms all in bud for us when we should arrive."

"How good of you!" she laughed. "Just as if you didn't know they bloom at the end of March! But where are the children? You also promised that they would be under the trees waiting for us."

Mr. Kurukawa looked a bit worried.

"It's strange," he said. "Ah, here come my mother and father-in-law."

His first wife's father and mother hastened down the path to meet them.

To the delight of the little American children, the old man and woman

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favored them with the most wonderful bows they had ever seen. In fact, the boy afterwards insisted that the old man's bald head had literally touched his own boots.

The new wife held out both her hands with a pretty impulse.

"Oh," she said, "I have heard all about you—how very, very good you have been to the children."

The old couple did not quite understand what she said, but feeling assured that it was something complimentary, they began a fresh series of bows, repeating over and over again one of the English words they had learned.

"Thangs, thangs, very thangs."

Mr. Kurukawa now inquired anxiously for his children. He had certainly expected they would be at the gate to meet them. The grandmother explained that only a mo-

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ment before the two little boys had been with her, and she had sent immediately for the little girls. But just as they came to the door the little boys had run away in fright, and were now shyly hiding somewhere.

“Gozo? What of Gozo?”

The two old people looked at each other. They did not know what to say.

“Pray come into the house, my son,” said Madame Sano. “We can better speak there.”

They had been talking in Japanese. Noting her husband's look of worry, Mrs. Kurukawa anxiously inquired the reason. Without explaining, he led her into the house. As they entered they were startled by the strange sound that greeted them. It was like the sharp sigh of a wind in an empty house. In reality it

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was the panic-stricken flight from the hallway of the children of Mr. Kurukawa.

Grouped closely together, the four children and Miss Summer had retreated to the far end of the hall, where they awaited the advent of the dreaded "barbarian" step-mother, for such Gozo had made them believe she must be. For many months they had conjured up in imagination pictures of their step-mother and her children.

They had seen but one foreigner in their town, the missionary, who had been their teacher. Him they had held in as much awe and fear as they would a strange animal.

Now their father appeared in the hall, holding by the arm what seemed to the children a most extraordinary looking creature, while behind them came, hand in hand, the strangest

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looking little boy and girl, with eyes so big that Plum Blossom thought them like those of a goblin. The face, however, which frightened them most was that of the Irish nurse, who bore the baby in her arms. The children gazed only a moment at this outlandish group; then with one accord they fled, each in a different direction.

The strangers coming from the out-door sunlight into the darkened hall had barely time to see the children ere they were gone. They had a hazy glimpse of a patch of color at the end of the hall, and then its sudden, wild dispersion. For a moment they stood looking about them in blank astonishment. Suddenly Mr. Kurukawa, who was ebullient with humor and good-nature, burst into laughter. He laughed so hard, indeed, that his wife, the children, and

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the nurse joined him. This unusual mirth in the house brought the children cautiously back, too curious and inquisitive to withstand the novelty of the situation.

Through the paper walls little fingers were cautiously thrust; little black eyes peered at the new-comers from behind these frail retrenchments.

When his mirth had subsided, Mr. Kurukawa favored his wife with a sly wink, and then quick as a flash he pushed back one of the shojis, disclosing the little figure behind it. He lifted it up by the bow of its obi. Something strange stuck closely to it and invited the gaze of Mrs. Kurukawa. It was the corset!

At the same time the father perceived it, and, pulling it off, held it aloft.

“Ah, ha!” he cried, “here is surely a little flag of truce.”

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He threw it aside and caught the little, trembling Plum Blossom in his arms, hugging her tightly. She hid her face in his bosom. After a time he set her down upon the floor.

"This," he said, "is Plum Blossom. In America she would be called Roly-poly—she is so fat, and, like her father, good-natured," and he pinched her cheek. "Go now," he bade her, "and kiss your new mother."

She went obediently, but with fear in her eyes, towards Mrs. Kurukawa. The latter knelt and held out both her arms. She was crying a bit, and possibly it was the tears and the sweet sound of her voice that won Plum Blossom. She tried to remember the speech she had learned, but the only words that came to her lips were:

"Come agin," and this she kept

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mechanically reiterating. "Come agin—come agin—come agin."

Here it is painful to relate that the young son of Mrs. Kurukawa chose to make himself heard in uncouth American slang. Billy spoke almost reflectively, as if he had heard that "Come agin" somewhere before. "Come agin, on agin, gone agin, Finnegan!" said Billy, promptly.

"Oh, Billy, hush!" said his mother, reprovingly, but Plum Blossom's face radiated. Here was a kindred spirit, one who had repeated her own words. "Come agin," and then possibly finer ones.

Meanwhile, Iris, showing first a curious little topknot, gradually projected her head, and then her whole body through the dividing doors. She stood in the opening greedily watching Plum Blossom. Half hidden behind her scanty little skirt,

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the small, fat face of Juji peered. Though no one so far had seen him, Juji, with the usual consciousness of two and a half years, was alternately showing and then hiding his face, being divided between a desire to stand joyfully on his head, or indulge in one of his famous roars. Iris, edging farther into the room, drew him after her. Mrs. Kurukawa perceived them. On the instant Juji sank to the floor, impeding the further progress of his sister by clinging to her legs.

“Oh, the darling little boy!” cried the little American girl, and ran to him to lift him up. Juji’s lip began to protrude ominously. Plum Blossom sprang into the breach.

“Juji! Juji!” she cried, in motherly Japanese, “don’t cry! Good boy! Give nice present to—l-lady!”

Whereupon Juji held out a grimy

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little hand, from which Plum Blossom extracted a crumpled paper package. She presented it to Mrs. Kurukawa with a smiling bow.

"Peanut!" said she, in English; "nize. For you!" She had remembered the words now.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, darling," said Mrs. Kurukawa. Wishing to show her delight in the gift, she added:

"Come, we will all have some."

She emptied the contents into her lap, then stared for a moment. Gradually her astonishment changed to laughter.

The package contained only shells. Juji had eaten the peanuts.

Plum Blossom and Iris felt completely disgraced. Iris, from the shelter of her father's arms, whither she had gone, now flew towards the wicked Juji.

"Oh, the bad boy!" she cried.

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Juji's lip broke. One of his terrific roars ensued. He was borne from the room by the humiliated little girls.

"And now," said Mr. Kurukawa, rubbing his hands and speaking in a loud voice: "Where are my sons? Taro!" he called.

Promptly the boy answered. He came literally tumbling into the hall, which, with the panels pushed aside, had now become a large room.

Taro's eyes evaded his father. For some time he had been watching intently the American boy from his peep-hole in the paper shoji. As he appeared at the call of his father, his eyes were still riveted upon his hated rival. Suddenly he made a catlike spring in the boy's direction and landed sprawling on Billy's chest. For the astonished Billy, tripped un-awares, was lying on his back. A great flame of indignation, and yet

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almost unwilling admiration, stirred within the heart of the prize fighter of a certain Chicago school.

Could it be possible that this little mite of a Jap was sitting victoriously on his chest? He growled and moved a bit, but Taro, wildly trying to keep in mind the few jiu-jitsu tricks he had lately learned, touched the boy's arm in a sensitive place.

Billy rose like a lion shaking off a troublesome cub. As Taro caught him about the calf of his leg, Billy reached down and took the little Japanese boy by the waist and coolly tucked him under his arm; then he marched up and down, singing at the top of his voice:

“Yankee Doodle came to town,  
Riding on a pony—  
Took a little Jappy Jap  
Who was a bit too funny!”

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Here it may be well to explain that Billy, besides being the prize fighter of his school, was also the class poet.

Mrs. Kurukawa rescued the little "Jappy Jap" from her big son's hands, and gave the latter a reproofing look, saying:

"Oh, Billy, is that the way to treat your little brother?"

"Well, mother," protested Billy, "he did get funny, now didn't he, father?" He appealed to Mr. Kurukawa, who was patting the ruffled head of the discomfited and conquered jiu-jitsu student.

Taro's expression had undergone a change. In his little black eyes a gleam of respect for Billy might have been seen. Suddenly he nodded his head significantly, and made a motion of his hand towards the garden, signifying in boy language the invitation:

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"Come outside. I'll show you some things."

Out they wandered together, excellent friends at once.

"Sa-ay," said Taro, pausing on the brink of his own private garden brook, "you—you," he touched Billy with a stiff little finger—"you—Gozo!"

Billy was at a loss to understand what "say — you — Gozo!" could mean, but he liked the look on Taro's face, so grinned and said: "Me — Gozo." Taro nodded. He had paid Billy the highest compliment in his power, likening him to the hero of the Kurukawa family, the great, elder brother Gozo.

#### IV

MEANWHILE, in the house, Mr. Kurukawa was inquiring urgently for Gozo. Where was he? Why was he not the first to greet his parents? The grandparents would not respond to his inquiries, but remained silent, looking very dejected and miserable. Their aspect alarmed Mr. Kurukawa, who now clapped his hands loudly. Several servants came running into the room in answer to his summons. Immediately the master questioned them:

“Where is my son Gozo?”

But all the response he received from the servants was a profound

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silence, broken by that hissing, sighing sound peculiar to the Japanese when moved, a drawing in of the breath through the teeth. Mr. Kurukawa recognized a boy who had been his own body-servant, and to him he strode, seizing the latter by the shoulder of his kimono. But the boy slipped from his hand to the ground and put his head at his master's feet. There, with his face hidden, he answered the questions put to him.

"Speak, my boy, where is Gozo?"

"O Excellency, young master—sir—" he broke off and began to cry, beating his head as he did so on the floor. Mr. Kurukawa raised him forcibly to his feet.

"What is it, Ido? Has anything happened to our Gozo?"

He could hardly bring the words out. The bare thought that mis-

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fortune had befallen his eldest son horrified him.

Ido dried his face on his sleeve, and from his new hiding-place spoke:

“Young master, sir, gone away, O Excellency!”

Mr. Kurukawa's grasp on the boy's shoulder relaxed. He stepped back and stood a moment silent, his hand against his forehead.

“What is it, Kiyo? What is it?” asked his wife, going to him and throwing an arm about him.

The color came back into her husband's face. He laughed a bit weakly.

“I thought it possible that my boy was—”

She held his hand tightly, her eyes full of tears.

“Oh, I understand. I do,” she said. “But where is he?”

Her husband stepped back to the

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

spot where Ido had been. Then he saw that in almost complete silence the servants, including Ido, had slipped from the room.

He fancied he heard the slight movement of their feet on the padded floor beyond the shoji. Impetuously and insistently he clapped his hands again, and silently they answered his summons. Nearly all the servants of the Kurukawa family had been in their service for years, some of them having served the grandparents. Their averted faces alarmed Mr. Kurukawa. This time he did not question them.

"Send Plum Blossom-san to me at once," he said.

The little girl was brought in. With her Iris and the consoled Juji came.

The father took the eldest girl by the hand; kneeling, he spoke to her almost pleadingly.

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"Tell father all about Gozo," he said.

Plum Blossom grew very red and looked towards Mrs. Kurukawa. Then she spoke low in Japanese, her hand half pointing in the direction of her step-mother.

"She—she—send away our Gozo," she said.

At the mention of Gozo's name Juji paused in his eating of a juicy persimmon to give signs of a renewal of his late tear-storm. Little Iris drew him comfortingly into her arms, soothing him in this wise:

"There, there, Juji, don't cry! Gozo is coming back some day. Oh, you should laugh, Juji, because our Gozo is so brave and fine. Think of it! He is a soldier of the beloved Ten-shi-sama!"

"Soldier!" cried Mr. Kurukawa, and leaped to his feet. "My boy a

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soldier!" he cried, almost staggering forward.

"Yes, father," said Plum Blossom. "Gozo is a *g-great* soldier now!"

Mr. Kurukawa went towards the grandparents.

"What does this mean? He was left in your charge. He is only a child—a mere boy of eighteen. How could he enlist at such an age?"

"He passed for older," said the grandmother, slowly. "We did everything to prevent his going—but he has gone."

"Ah, I see—I understand," said Mr. Kurukawa. For a moment his face was lighted as a look of pride swept across it. "The boy was inspired. He could not wait to come of age. He wanted to give his young life for his country, his Emperor. I am proud of him. Where is he now?"

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"The last time we heard from him he was at Port Arthur. That was—two months ago."

"Ah-h! Condescend to give me his letter—"

The grandmother slowly and reluctantly took it from her sleeve and handed it to the father. Mr. Kurukawa's eager fingers shook as he unfolded the letter, a long, narrow sheet, covered with the bold and characteristic writing up and down the pages of his son Gozo. As he perused it his face grew darkly red. The sheet rustled in his hands. When he had finished he crushed it, and stood for a moment in silence, anger and sorrow combating within him.

"So," he finally spoke, "it was not honorable loyalty to the Mikado which inspired him, but a mean emotion—hatred of one he does not even know. I expected better of my son."

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He let the crumpled letter fall from his hand. Stooping, the grandmother picked it up, to place it tenderly in her sleeve. She spoke with a touch of reproach in her voice:

“Kurukawa Kiyskichi,” she said, “never before have I heard your lips speak bitterly of your eldest son. Be not inspired to feel anger towards him.” She glanced at Mrs. Kurukawa as though she were the one at fault. “Gozo is a good boy, has always been so. It was not hatred, as you say, which prompted him to leave his own. Call it rather a boy’s feeling of resentment, that the place of the one he had loved dearly—his mother—should so soon be filled—and by a bar—”

She did not finish the word. Her son-in-law stopped her with a stern gesture.

“Say no more, honorable mother-

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in-law. It is enough that my son has, without so much as referring to me in the matter, left my house. In his letter he speaks slanderously of one who is good, who was ready to love him as her very son. She is my wife just as much as Gozo's mother was. She is not an intruder in her husband's house, and my son has no right to question her place here. Of his own free will he has left his father's house. Very well, he shall never return to—"

"What does it all mean?" broke in his wife with agitation. "Tell me what you are saying, Kiyō. Where is Gozo?"

"I will tell unto you," spoke the grandmother, going towards her. "Better, madame, that you should know. I say not English well, but—"

"I understand you."

"Gozo—our boy—go way—mek

soldier—fight Lussians. He angry account *you*—therefore he be soldier—”

“Account—*me!* Why, I don’t understand—that is— Yes—I think I do understand. He was opposed to his father’s marriage?”

“He love his *mother,*” said the old woman, and then began to tremble, for Mrs. Kurukawa had hidden her face in her hands. The grandmother spoke uncertainly.

“Pray egscuse—I sawry—ve’y sawry. Gozo—Gozo—*bad.*” She brought the word out as if it hurt her to admit this much of her best-loved grandchild.

“No, no,” said Mrs. Kurukawa, softly. “He is not bad. I understand him. Why, it was only natural.” She moved appealingly towards her husband. “Don’t you remember, Kiyō, I feared this—that the children might not *want* me.”

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“And I told you,” said he, quickly, “that it was not my children you were marrying, but myself.”

“You are angry with that boy,” she cried.

“Angry! I will never forgive him!”

“Oh, you don’t mean that.”

“We will not talk of it any longer,” said her husband, turning away.

The boy had written:

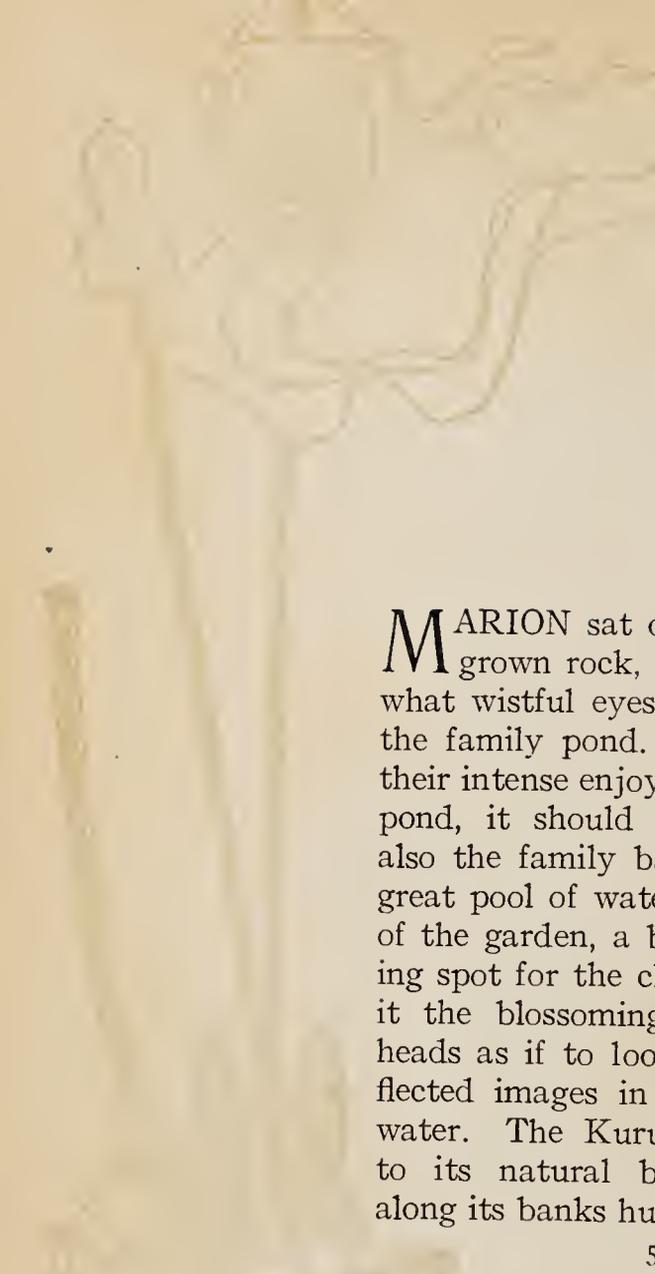
“The barbarian female who has taken my mother’s place is a witch—a fox woman—a devil! Otherwise how could she have worked upon my father’s mind so soon to forget our mother? I could not remain at home and face such a woman. Better that I should go. Here, at least, my bitter thoughts can do no injury. How I long to be exposed to great danger! Maybe, if I die, my father will be sorry!”

Such unfilial, rebellious words were unheard of from a Japanese son.

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Left to the care of his doting old grandparents, Mr. Kurukawa saw clearly how much Gozo had needed the guiding hand of a father.





V

MARION sat on a gigantic moss-grown rock, looking with somewhat wistful eyes at the children in the family pond. She envied them their intense enjoyment. The family pond, it should be explained, was also the family bath-tub. It was a great pool of water, set in the heart of the garden, a beautiful and alluring spot for the children. All about it the blossoming trees bent their heads as if to look at their own reflected images in the mirror of the water. The Kurukawas had added to its natural beauty by placing along its banks huge rocks of strange



“ MARION SAT ON A GIGANTIC MOSS-GROWN ROCK, LOOKING . . . .  
AT THE CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY POND ”



## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

formation, very charming to look at, and comfortable to sit upon.

Out over the water a sort of pleasure-booth was built, over which the wistaria vines clambered and bloomed in wild profusion. This was the dolls' house of the little Japanese girls. In the water were two diminutive sampans and also a raft, the property of Taro, inherited from Gozo.

The pond was a natural one. It might have been termed a small lake, but the family had always referred to it as "the pond," and even had called it the "bath," for that was its chief use. The little Kurukawas dipped into it sometimes three times a day in the summer. They had almost literally spent their lives in it. Even three-year-old Juji would throw his fat little hands over his head, and dive into the water, swimming as naturally as a wild duck.

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Now as Marion watched the shining brown bodies of her step-brothers and sisters her eyes unconsciously filled with tears. Why could not she throw aside her white starched clothes and join them in their pleasures? It was not that her mother would not permit her; but Marion's sensitive soul had been deeply wounded by the manner of her step-sisters when first she had put on a kimono, and had gone, with innocent friendliness, to join them. At first the little girls had regarded her with amazement. Summer, who happened to be with them, hid her face behind her fan, where she giggled and tittered in the most provoking way imaginable. Plum Blossom asked, bluntly:

"Wha's thad? Dress?"

"My kimono," faltered Marion.

"Where you git?"

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"Mother bought it at a Japanese store in Chicago."

Plum Blossom shook her head disapprovingly, while Iris, in imitation of Summer, began to titter also.

"Thas nod Japanese," said Plum Blossom, severely.

Marion had moved proudly and silently away.

"Mother," she cried, running into her room, with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes, "give me back my own clothes. Oh, I never, never, never want to wear these horrid things again," she sobbed in her mother's lap.

And now, a week later, Marion still wore her white starched gown of piqué, and sat there on the rock, quite alone; for Billy was one of the happy bathers in the shining spring-pond. It was against him she felt most bitter. He was her own, own

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brother; yet there he was quite at home with the enemy, even sometimes pushing the boat which held that "nasty Miss Summer," who was at the root of all her trouble. She felt sure she could have been happy with Plum Blossom and Iris had not Summer, in some way, influenced them against her. And as for dear, little, fat Juji, why, she just loved him!—even if he did scream every time she came near him and ran from her as fast as his little, fat, frightened legs could carry him. Summer had told him Marion was a fox-girl, who would bite him if she caught him. At first Juji had regarded this announcement with doubt. Full of confidence because of the winning, smiling face of Marion, he had even timorously gone into her arms. Lo and behold, she had indeed attempted to "bite"

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him, for such the kiss had seemed to Juji, who had never been kissed in all his life. After that, Juji had kept his distance from the "yellow-haired fox-girl."

There was a sudden squeal of delight from the pond. Something flashed in the sun a moment. Then over went the sampan in which the three little Japanese girls were seated. Billy had tipped it over, immersing the three girls, who came up shaking their little black heads, and swam towards the raft, upon which they clambered.

Leading from the booth to the shore was a little arched bridge, part, indeed, of the pleasure-booth. Suspended between a pole on shore and another half-way out in the water, was a long, delightful bamboo rest. The gymnastic Taro would climb out on this pole as easily as a kitten; he

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would twist and twirl about, and end with his head hanging over the water and his feet clinging to the pole. Each time he performed these tricks Billy was filled with an intense ambition to transport his step-brother to America, to exhibit him to his old school-mates.

Now the rock on which Marion sat was close to the shore end of the bamboo pole, and near to the little arbor. As she sat there in sad dejection, Taro softly clambered up from the water end of the bamboo pole and crawled along the ridge until he stood over the head of the unconscious girl. His body swayed, until he rested in his favorite position and hung by his feet from the pole. One quick, sharp push, and the next moment the little girl on the rock was plunged head-foremost into the water below. Taro had re-

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venged the upsetting of his sisters from the boat by Billy. The latter went suddenly white to his lips and began swimming frantically in the direction of his sister.

One fleeting glimpse of the boy's horrified face Taro had; then he understood. Marion could not swim!

On the instant he threw up his arms and dived. Never had Billy seen anything so quick as that lightning dive and swift return of Taro. He supported his step-sister while he swam with her to the shore. She had been hardly a minute in the water; but she was frightened. Her little hands and face were blue, her teeth were chattering, and she was shivering and crying hysterically, although it was sultry and warm. The first words she spoke were:

"Billy—I—I'm all right. Pl-please

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don't fight Taro about it," for Billy was pugnaciously regarding his step-brother.

The other children were now all about her, Plum Blossom's motherly little face looking very concerned. The water was dripping from the kimonos of the three Japanese girls. As they looked at the drenched Marion a kindred feeling must have possessed them simultaneously, for suddenly they all laughed outright in unison, Marion joining with them. She was almost glad of the adventure now, as she said:

"If I had on a kimono—I'd—I'd go into the water with you."

"You want keemono?" inquired Taro, eagerly.

"Yes," she nodded.

He brought her his own.

She laughed with delight, and Iris and Plum Blossom clapped their



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hands. What fun to see the yellow-haired one arrayed in a boy's kimono! But Marion had disappeared with the garment. A few minutes later she returned clad in it, to the uproarious delight of every one.

Taro himself wore with great pride one of Billy's bathing-suits.

As the sampan moved down the surface of the tiny lake, Marion confided to Plum Blossom, who held one of her hands, while Iris held the other:

"I wanted so much to go into the water, but—I thought you didn't want me. Oh, dear, I feel so *comfy* in this dear old loose thing," she added.

"Tha's nize," said Plum Blossom.

"Vaery nize," agreed Iris.

Summer, sitting in the stern of the boat, opened her paper parasol. The sight of it sent the little girls into

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another peal of laughter. When Billy upset the boat the parasol had shared the fate of its owner as it was thrust into her obi in front. The effect of its bath was ludicrously apparent. Being of paper, it split in several places as she opened it. Now as she held it loftily above her head, water of several shades of color rolled from it to splash upon its haughty owner, for just at this moment Summer was endeavoring to make an impression upon the sisters. She had succeeded beyond her expectations. The boat rocked with the wild gale of their mirth.

## VI

IT was the day after Marion's accident that the baby was lost, or, rather, "shtolen," as the nurse-maid put it.

Norah had taken it in its carriage a short distance from the house. In Chicago it had been her daily duty to push the baby up and down the street on which they lived. The Kurukawas' garden was of a fair size, but its dimensions were limited for Norah's purpose. Moreover, the girl was intensely homesick "for the soight of the face of a foine cop!"

When she had gone to America, one of the first things she noticed

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was that all, or nearly all, the policemen were Irish. The idea occurred to her that it might be the same in Japan. And so, unmindful of the instructions of her mistress not to leave the vicinity of the house, Norah sallied forth, and wandered on until she came to the main street of the little town. The news of the presence in the street of a most extraordinary looking foreign devil, a giant in size, pushing an outlandish jinrikisha with a pale-faced, yellow-haired baby in it, spread like wild-fire through the surrounding streets. Soon a small mob of children and a number of curious men and women were following and surrounding Norah. Some of them ran ahead of her, impeding the progress of the baby-carriage. At first Norah regarded them with inherent good-humor, but after a time she became

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embarrassed and annoyed. A little girl of about seven years had actually climbed over the front of the carriage, and there she perched, regarding the baby with great curiosity.

Norah stopped. One hand sought her plump hip, and the other doubled to a fist, which she shook.

"Now, you young spalpeen," said she, "you climb down, or I'll put you down none too gently. Off with you, you haythen imp!"

The little girl regarded her unblinkingly, but the surrounding crowd began to jabber excitedly. Norah turned upon them.

"Shure, it's a fine lot of haythens you be! wid nothing better to consarn yerselves wid than the business of others. Off wid you all, or Oi'll make short worruk of the boonch of yez."

A threatening movement cleared

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

a space about her. Her fighting blood was up. She began to lay about her in every direction, spanking a little boy on her right, pushing along by the ear another, and cuffing a giggling maiden of fifteen summers, whose tittering had for some time irritated her. But in attacking the children following her, Norah made a mistake. The "haythens," merely curious at first, now became aggressive. In a few minutes there was a concerted rush in the direction of the Irish girl. She took fright at this, and at the top of her voice shrieked:

"Police! Police! Murdher! Hilp!"

Her cry had immediate effect. Some one came running towards her. The crowd fell back, and indeed dispersed almost in silence at the approach of the little, uniformed figure which descended upon them. He

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

made his way straight to Norah with wonder. She watched the magic effect of his coming upon the crowd, and as he came up to her she spoke admiringly:

"Shure it's the Mikado himself yer afther being, I should think, from the grand way you're threated."

He touched her arm with a hand of authority.

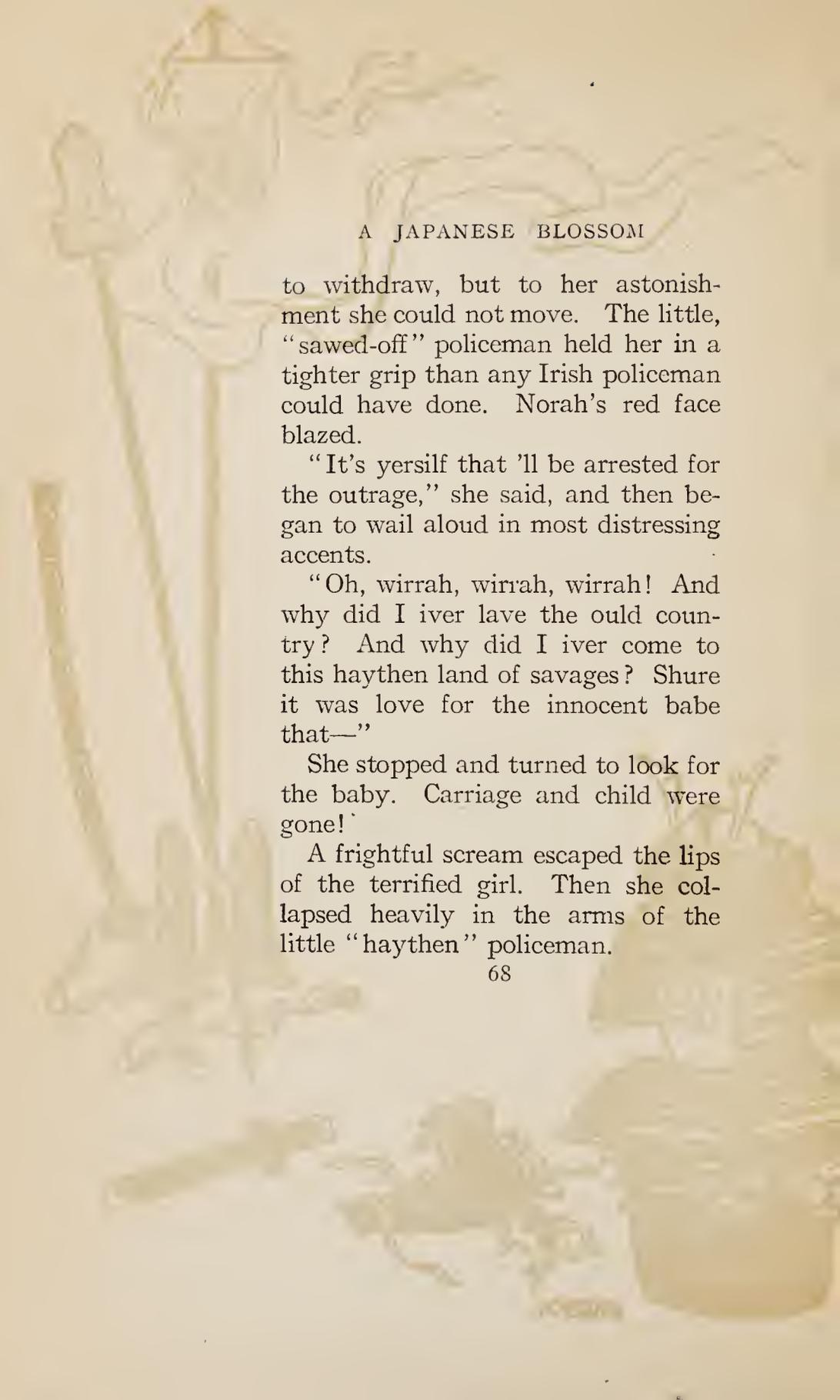
"I have the honor to arrest you," said he, in distinct English.

"Arrest me!" shouted the now irate Norah. "And who in Harry are you?"

"Police," said the little man, shortly.

"You a policeman!" cried Norah. "Now the saints forgive you for the lie! Shure, I niver saw a policeman of your sawed-off size before! Where I come from—"

But the grip upon her arm had tightened. Indignantly Norah sought



A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

to withdraw, but to her astonishment she could not move. The little, "sawed-off" policeman held her in a tighter grip than any Irish policeman could have done. Norah's red face blazed.

"It's yersilf that 'll be arrested for the outrage," she said, and then began to wail aloud in most distressing accents.

"Oh, wirrah, wirrah, wirrah! And why did I iver lave the ould country? And why did I iver come to this haythen land of savages? Shure it was love for the innocent babe that—"

She stopped and turned to look for the baby. Carriage and child were gone!

A frightful scream escaped the lips of the terrified girl. Then she collapsed heavily in the arms of the little "haythen" policeman.

## VII

IT would be cruel to dwell upon the sufferings of Norah. She came to consciousness while being carried bodily through the streets by half a dozen of "the finest" in Japan. But she retained consciousness only long enough to give vent to another terrific shriek and then faint again. When next she came to, she was in the "dhirty haythen doongeon," as she termed it. There Mr. Kurukawa found her, secured her release, and took her home.

But the baby! It was only a little after nine when Norah had gone forth so bravely. By five in the afternoon

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

the search for the baby had not ended. Everybody in the village appeared to have had the baby at one time or another through the day. The little one had been passed from house to house as an object of curiosity. Its clothing was a marvel to all Japanese eyes; its blue eyes were extraordinary; its little wisps of yellow hair the most amazing of sights ever seen in the little town; and its milk-white skin positively unreal. Japanese mothers brought their own brown offspring and put them side by side with the little white baby. They patted its little, chubby hands, and put their fingers into its mouth. The latter never failed to please the Kurukawa baby, which immediately fell to sucking the finger greedily. After a time, however, as no milk was forthcoming from the numberless fingers thus offered, the baby became cross.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

Then nobody wanted it any longer.

Mr. and Mrs. Kurukawa and a policeman went about the town hunting for the child. The mother was almost prostrated, but insisted on accompanying her husband. As they turned away from each house the mother grew paler and more fearful. Finally the policeman suggested that they abandon the search until the following morning. It was getting towards night, and the Japanese retire early.

The parents would not hear of this. They would search all night if necessary. The policeman shrugged his shoulders. Very well, he had other duties. As the honorable excellencies could see for themselves, the streets were already almost deserted. Indeed, there were only a few children left yonder in the street. The father and mother turned al-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

most aimlessly towards the place where a number of children were playing skip rope. One little girl after another would jump back and forth over the swinging rope. One girl seemed less nimble than the others. She slipped once, and trod on the rope often. As the Kurukawas came nearer to the group they noticed her because she seemed humpbacked. But the hump upon her back bobbed and moved up and down. When she stopped skipping and came to their side of the rope the hump upon her back moved a bit higher, until it rested against her neck. It was a little baby's head!

Mrs. Kurukawa uttered a faint cry and rushed upon the little girl, pitifully trying to drag the baby from her back. It was sound asleep and seemed perfectly comfortable and none the worse for its late ad-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

ventures. Mrs. Kurukawa hugged it wildly.

"Oh, my little, little baby!" she sobbed. It opened its sleepy blue eyes and goood and gurgled softly.

From this time forth the baby became the centre of attraction to all the family. Even Juji seemed to be conscious of its enviable position. Was it not surrounded at all times by the little girls? Was it not hugged and petted in a way he had considered due only to him from his sisters?

He had watched with wonder the queer little plaything ever since it had come into the house. It was no larger than some dolls his sisters had; but when it opened its mouth it could make a noise almost as loud as Juji himself. In fact, its noises and its limbs and everything about it had an absorbing interest for Juji.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

He began to hang about its vicinity. Norah would discover him pressed up close to her knee, his little, serious slits of eyes intent upon every movement of the baby.

“Bless his heart,” she would say. “Shure the little lamb loves his wee brother. Then give him a nice kiss,” whereupon she would put the baby’s face close to Juji. The latter would rub his nose against the fat, soft, baby cheek. He must have pondered over his little step-brother, for one night Norah was awakened by strange little sounds in the vicinity of the baby’s bed. She reached over in the dark, found and enclosed a little hand in her large one. Then she saw a little figure in bed with the baby. Juji was sitting up and leaning over the baby. In his hand was a bottle, the end of which was thrust into the baby’s mouth!

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

Norah was too astonished at first to do anything but watch the child. Then she seized him.

"You lamb!" said she. "If you aren't the swatest haythen, shure I don't know who is!"

"Opey mouth," said little Juji, in English, and pushed the bottle towards Norah's lips.

He had seen the nurse-maid do this with the baby, and had heard her say:

"Opey mouthie, lovey!"

He had found the bottle, and while all were asleep and there was no one to interfere with him, he had sought to feed his baby step-brother.

## VIII

MARION came flying into the garden, her cheeks aglow, her bright eyes dancing.

"Iris—Blossom!" she called, excitedly.

She could hardly get her breath to tell them the great news. In her hand she waved aloft a sheet of paper.

"What ees't?" asked Plum Blossom, puzzled.

"A letter," cried Marion. "Guess who from?"

"Gozo," both answered at once. Marion nodded.

"Right," she said, "and to me!—*me!*" She began dancing airily about,

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waving the letter triumphantly and then caressing it.

Iris shrieked the news across the garden to Taro, pirouetting on his beloved pole. He leaped down and came running to join them.

"Why he ride unto *you*?" demanded Plum Blossom, enviously.

"Well, now, I'll tell you," confided Marion, sweetly. "You know ever since we've been here I've heard nothing but Gozo, Gozo, Gozo, from you all. Goodness! you never speak a sentence without 'Gozo' in it. Well, *I* began to think him a real hero, and I just longed to *know* him. Besides"—she lowered her voice—"I did think he ought to be warned about that—about Summer!"

"About Summer?" repeated Plum Blossom, hazily.

"We kinno understan'. You spik so fast."

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“Oh, dear, don't you see? Why, she's not good enough for a *hero*—now is she?”

“Wha's 'hero'?” asked Taro, disgustedly. Had they brought him from his favorite sport merely to bother him with words he could not understand.

“A hero is—is—well, he's something *grand!*”

Iris yawned sleepily. She had forgotten all about the letter and now was lying on the grass blinking sleepily at the blue sky overhead.

“You're not listening, Iris,” said Marion, frowning upon her and forcing her to get up.

“Don't you want to hear Gozo's letter?”

“Yes, yes—spik it,” urged Plum Blossom.

“But I didn't finish what I was saying—explaining *why* he wrote me.

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

Don't you see, *I* wrote to him first. Yes, I did, too, I wrote him the longest letter, and I told him about you all—and—and—can he read English?"

Billy had joined the group, and he spoke up now:

"Ah, sis, go on now—read his answer. What's he say?"

"But I can't read it. See, it's in Japanese."

"You read it, Taro."

"Me?" Taro seized the letter, and began laboriously reading it in Japanese.

"Well, well, what does he say?" asked Marion, excitedly.

Plum Blossom looked over her brother's shoulder and translated in this wise:

"M-M-MADAME,—Your letter got—

"Yours truly forever,

"KURUKAWA GOZO."

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"Is that all?" inquired Marion, blankly, her blue eyes filling with tears.

"Postscript," shouted Taro, then read it: "Write agin, thangs!"

Marion pouted and sat down in deep dejection.

"Well, I won't do it, if *that's* the way he answers *my* letters."

She took the letter and went to her mother.

## IX

ON the 15th of April the children dressed themselves in pink-and-white kimonos, simulating cherry blossoms, and strolled abroad for *hanami* (flower picnic). They had been looking forward to this delightful occasion for weeks. The costumes had been prepared by their grandmother some days in advance of the festival. Even Marion had a little, white crêpe kimono embroidered with the pale pink flower, and with the sash or obi of the same shade. She made quite a picture, as with her eyes dancing and shining she came running into the garden to join her

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

step-sisters. The wings of the dainty sleeves of her dress fluttered back and forth. Her cheeks were the color of the cherry blossom, and the golden crown of her hair, drawn up into the Japanese fashion, glistened in the sun. Plum Blossom wore a crêpe silk gown of deep pink, shading at the ends to white. The sash was white with pale green leaves and stalks embroidered on it. Iris, too, was in pink, and the bow of her obi was tied to imitate a cherry blossom. The three little girls had flowers in their hair—cherry blossoms, of course. They waited now in the garden for their brothers and parents. As the festival was new to Marion, she was the most eager of the girls.

From above their heads a voice rang out:

“Here, you, girls! get your masks and petals ready.”

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"Where are you, Billy?" called Marion, looking everywhere about them.

"Here—up in the tree."

He was perched in an old cherry-tree, where with vandal hand he was plucking the blossoms.

"O-o-oo!" exclaimed Plum Blossom. "You ba' boy! No can pig flower. Tha's nod ride!"

"Why, father *said* we were to fill our sleeves—get all we could," called down Billy.

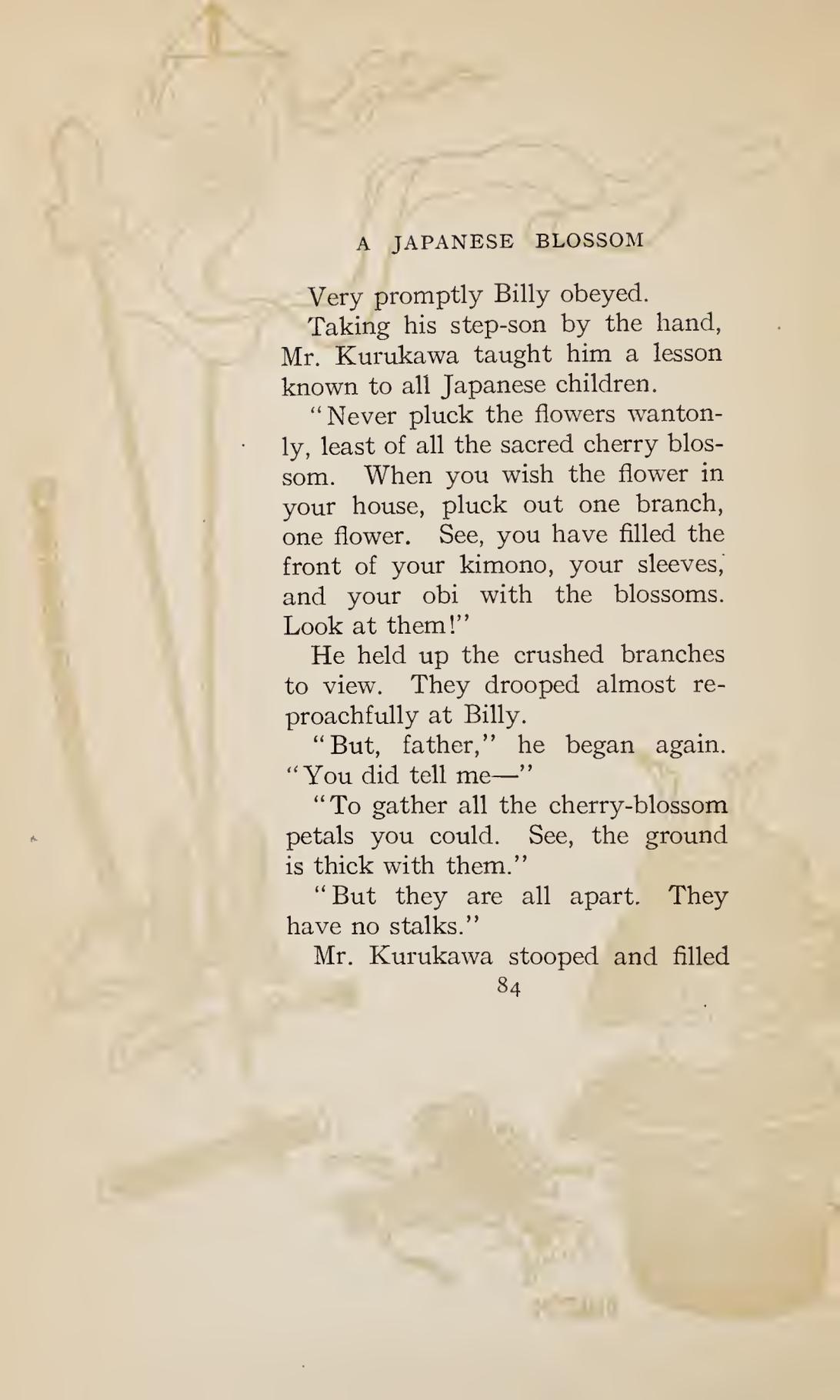
"Yes, pig from ground," said Plum Blossom; "never mus' pig from tree."

"Billy, you vandal, what are you doing up there?"

Mr. Kurukawa had joined the children in the garden. He, too, was in Japanese dress.

"Why," said Billy, "you said—"

"Now, my boy, come down."



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Very promptly Billy obeyed.

Taking his step-son by the hand, Mr. Kurukawa taught him a lesson known to all Japanese children.

“Never pluck the flowers wantonly, least of all the sacred cherry blossom. When you wish the flower in your house, pluck out one branch, one flower. See, you have filled the front of your kimono, your sleeves, and your obi with the blossoms. Look at them!”

He held up the crushed branches to view. They drooped almost reproachfully at Billy.

“But, father,” he began again. “You did tell me—”

“To gather all the cherry-blossom petals you could. See, the ground is thick with them.”

“But they are all apart. They have no stalks.”

Mr. Kurukawa stooped and filled

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his hands full of petals. He held them a moment and then lightly tossed them into the air.

"*That* is how we want them, boy. We use them like confetti. Now fill all your sleeves, children. Get as many as you can, and then we'll start."

Soon the long sleeves of their dresses were filled with the petals, and hung like little pillows. Mrs. Kurukawa was the last to join the merry party. All the children helped her to fill her sleeves, for she, too, wore the national kimono.

"Here are your masks, children," said the father. With laughing chatter they fastened on the grotesque masks and clambered into the jinrikishas. It was a joyful day.

They passed numbers of picnickers, and exchanged showers of cherry-blossom petals with them.

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They ate a delicious luncheon under a tree fairly weighted down with the heavenly flower. While they were in the midst of their repast, Taro and Billy mounted into the tree and shook it till the lunch was almost hidden under the petals, and the heads of all were crowned in cherry pink.

The petals they slipped into their food purposely, declaring that it added a delicious taste. Then the children played battledore and shuttlecock. Later, there being a pleasant wind, Mr. Kurukawa sent up a kite. Billy was permitted to hold the string. This was great fun, especially when Taro's kite had a race with Billy's, and finally won. By four in the afternoon they were all so refreshingly tired that nobody wanted to go home, and soon "father" was besieged for a story.

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"Make it modern, father," said Billy, "for we like that kind best."

"Well, let's see. What shall it be about?"

"War," shouted Taro.

For a while there was silence, and Mr. Kurukawa looked very grave. He was thinking of Gozo.

"Very well," said he, after a moment's thought. "I will tell you a true story of to-day which has to do with a war."

"Make it very, very long, father," said Plum Blossom.

"And exciting," said Taro.

"With a little girl in it," said Iris.

"No, no, a liddle boy," growled Juji.

"It's about a little woman," said Mr. Kurukawa, "and she was called 'The Widow of Sanyo.'"

## X

THIS is the story the Japanese father told, in English, for his own children understood the language better than they spoke it.

“You must know, children, that all loyal Japanese love and reverence Ten-shi-sama (the Mikado). No true Japanese would hesitate to give his life for the father of us all. That is why our boys go to war with faces shining like the sun. That is why we bid them go, and do not weep because we love them. We are proud and glad to give them for such service.”

“Father,” put in little Iris very

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gently, "*we* are glad to give our Gozo, are we not?"

He hesitated a moment, and then said, simply:

"Yes, my child. But this story is not of Gozo."

It was the first time since his return that he had mentioned his son's name, and he did it without any sign of bitterness. His wife reached out and sought his hand, which she held for a moment closely.

"Go on," urged Billy. "What do you want to interrupt for, Iris?"

She leaned against her father. He put his arm about her.

"Ten million egscuse," said she to Billy.

"Where does the *widow* come in?" asked Billy.

"Well, she was not a widow at the beginning. She was just a very young and very beautiful girl. But

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she had the spirit of a man. You see, before she came, her parents had prayed for a son to give to the service of Ten-shi-sama; but they were unfortunate. Their gods gave them only a girl, and they never felt quite the same to her as they would to a boy. They were very powerful people, and of noble ancestry, so they did not wish their race to die out. They prayed constantly for a son, and all they got was one daughter. Quite unfairly, they neglected the girl, just as if it were her fault that she were not born a boy. She grew up in the great shiro (palace) all alone, under the care of servants and tutors. None of the relatives cared to see her. Her mother died when she was born, and her father, being in the cabinet service of the Mikado, rarely saw her. But though a maiden, as I have said, she had the

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soul of a man, and she yearned to do the deeds of a man and a hero. Every morning of her life, as a little girl, she would prostrate herself before her shrine and beseech the gods to perform some miracle whereby she might indeed become a man. But that was a child's prayer, and of course vain. So from childhood she came to womanhood. Looking one day into her mirror, she beheld the most beautiful face she had ever seen. Hitherto she had scorned to loiter over her mirror. Her thoughts were on other matters than her looks, she told herself. But this day she picked up her mirror on a sudden impulse, and the face which looked back at her so enthralled her that she could not put it down.

“‘Why,’ said she, ‘I am the most beautiful maiden in Japan!’ For

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a long time she continued to look at her face. Then she spoke again:

“‘And to think,’ said she, ‘that no one but my servants have ever seen me!’”

“What did she look like?” asked Marion.

“Well, let me see. I do not know whether Americans would regard her as the highest type of beauty, but to the Japanese mind she would have been considered peerless. Her hair was so black and shiny it was like lacquer. Sometimes when her maid would take it down it fell to her knees in a perfect glory of ebony. Her eyes were of the same color, almost pure black, and they were very long and poetic looking, the thick lashes veiling them. Her brows were perfectly formed, a slim, silky black line above the eyes. Her nose was thin and very delicate. Her mouth

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was small, the lower lip a trifle pointed, curling up just the least bit at the corners. The lips were red as blood. The shape of her face was oval, though her chin was delicately pointed. And she had tiny pink ears, as pretty as a baby's, and small, exquisite hands."

"Kiyo," said Mrs. Kurukawa, gently, "who is this Japanese Venus?" She smiled.

"The Widow of Sanyo," he replied as gently. "This is as she appeared when she looked at her own image in the mirror.

"Well, it was on that very day that Japan proclaimed war against China, and the country was pulsing with fever. Haru, as her name was, had spent many wretched hours in her chamber. Her despair and impatience at being unable to serve the Mikado and her country, was break-

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ing her heart. What could she do, a helpless maiden? All the employment left to women she scorned. She wanted to do something more than a mere woman could accomplish. Her soul was the soul of a man, not a maiden's. All day she prayed, and all night, and then she looked into her mirror and saw that lovely face! Suddenly the face changed, became curiously illuminated. A great idea had come to her. It was this:

“The gods had given her marvellous beauty. What man could resist her? She would wed a man, bear him children, and give them all to the Mikado.

“That was her first thought.

“But the war would be over by the time her children were grown—and they might not be men!

“No, that would never do!

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“A better way presented itself to her. She sprang wildly to her feet, and wildly she clapped her hands, so!”

He illustrated her action, and the children did likewise, as they moved nearer their father to hear, their eyes wide with excitement.

“Her servants came running to answer her summons. She bade them dress her in the most beautiful and luxurious garments. At once a dozen maids waited on her. One brushed her glossy hair, dressed it in the most becoming mode, placed long, golden daggers and pins with sparkling stones glistening in them, and on either side of her ears set precious kanzashi. Another manicured, perfumed, and massaged her little hands. Still another softly kneaded her face until the blood sprang to the surface, and made it

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more beautiful than any paint could do. Then they robed her in a rosy gown—one fit only for a princess—as perhaps she was.”

He paused here, and the impatient children prompted him.

“Well—well?”

“What did she do then?”

“She was carried from the house and gently lifted into a gorgeous norimono.”

“A norimono!” cried Billy. “What’s a norimono?”

“Why—a little—something they used before jinrikishas.”

“But did not this all happen recently?” It was Marion’s question.

“Yes, that’s so,” admitted the romancer. “Now that I think of it, what she did was to walk down to her gate and allow them to lift her into the jinrikisha. That’s where the ‘lifting’ comes in.”

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"Then where did she go?"

"I know," said Taro.

"Where?" queried Billy.

"She go ad temple."

"What for?"

"Pray to gods mek her man ride away."

"Did she, father?"

"No. She drove to—" Again he paused.

"Where? Where?"

"To the house of the best known Nakoda in the town."

"Nakoda!" Even Mrs. Kurukawa echoed the word.

"Professional match-maker."

"Oh-h—what did she want there?" questioned Marion.

"A husband," said Mr. Kurukawa.

"Well, in she walked, and the Nakoda, when he beheld her glorious beauty, was overcome with the honor of her presence in his house. Said she:

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“Honorable creature, cease to degrade yourself at my insignificant feet. Pray arise.”

“He did so, humbly and apologetically.

“Now, in America, a girl might have said: ‘Have you any husbands for sale?’ In Japan the girl said: ‘Deign to prepare a look-at meeting for me. I wish to marry.’

“Then she proceeded to explain herself further by means of questions.

“‘Know you many men creatures so depraved of mind they prefer not to go to the war?’

“‘I am, alas, acquainted with many such depraved reptiles,’ answered the Nakoda.

“‘Ah! Well, it is such a one I would marry. Do you think I can secure such a husband?’

“‘No man can look in the sublime direction of your serenity without

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immediately being willing to do anything you might command,' declared the Nakoda.

"That is well, then,' she smiled, graciously. 'Bring forth a man-worm!'

"Well, a man-worm was brought forth and he fell at her feet. The thought of his great fortune in being able to marry any one so beautiful nearly drove him out of his senses.

"They were married at once, without much ceremony, and she took him home. He was like one in a dream of heavenly bliss. Well, the first thing she said to him as they entered the palace was:

"'Man, dost thou adore me?'

"He fell on his face and kissed the hem of her robe."

"Kiyo, I believe you're making it all up as you go along," interposed his wife here.

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"Hush! Hush! We are coming to the thrilling part."

"What a story to tell children!"

"When does the war begin?" asked Billy.

"Oh, the war is going right on now. Well, then, he fell on his face; she graciously bent over and lifted up his head, and she spoke in the most wooing of voices:

"If you of a truth adore me, are you ready to die for me?"

"He said he wanted to live for her. She shook her head, and said she wanted better proof of his affection than that. He then declared he would do anything she asked.

"She thereupon said: 'You must be a soldier!' At this he began to tremble, for he was a great coward at heart. However, she kept him in her house for five days, teaching him the principles of bravery and valor.

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At the end of that time she had so wrought upon his feelings that she persuaded him to enlist. She went in person to see him march away, which he did quite bravely for him! Her last words were the noble ones Japanese women say to their men at such a time: 'I give you to Ten-shi-sama. Come not back to me. Glorious may be your end. The blessings of Shahra upon you.'

"He was not a good soldier; he turned out to be a wretched one, indeed, and in a short time was killed. She was free again to marry. Then she chose another man-worm, and again she sacrificed him to her Emperor, with the same result. He was one of those doomed in a transport sunk in Chinese waters. She married again, and her third husband was killed. Her fourth husband was blown to atoms, and her fifth met

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the fate of the first. Her sixth died scarcely six months later, and her seventh died of melancholia while in Manchuria.

"Now, seven is a lucky number, and she stopped there. She said: 'If I marry another I will have no more luck. He will live, and I have given seven men already to the Emperor. What woman of Japan has done more? Behold, I am a widow seven times over.'

"That is why she is called 'The Widow of Sanyo.'"

So the story ended.

"Is she still beautiful?" questioned Plum Blossom, wistfully.

"Very."

"Ugh!" said Marion, "I think she's horrid."

Taro rolled into Billy on the grass.

"I'll be the next," said Billy.

Iris was softly crying.

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"Why, what's the matter?" asked her father.

"Oh, father," said she, "I—I'm afraid that *she* was the fox-woman who sent away our Gozo—and not—mother!"

He embraced her.

"There, it was a foolish story."

"And told," said his wife, "in the way an American would tell it—not a Japanese!"

"Hm!" Mr. Kurukawa cleared his throat. "Well, I think you'll admit I began in the most approved Japanese style, but as I went on I fell under your American influence, and by the time I reached the end the story was just as you might have told it."

They gathered up their baskets and piled them into the jinrikishas. Juji was sound asleep on the grass. The cherry-blossom petals had fallen

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so thickly upon him that he seemed half buried in them. Mr. Kurukawa bent over him tenderly. He turned his head back towards his wife; at once she came and knelt among the petals by his side. His voice was husky.

“That is how my Gozo looked as a little boy,” he said, softly.

She kissed the sleeping Juji.

## XI

LIFE would be delightful were it made up entirely of flower picnics. But even in the land of sunrise storms must come.

The little family of Kurukawa, idling and playing in the small inland town, for the nonce seemed to put behind them all thought of care. Even the father, in the first few weeks of his return, refused utterly to do otherwise than enjoy what he termed his "honeymoon" with his wife and children. But the honeymoon season began to wane. It was not possible for any Japanese, however optimistic and cheerful in tem-

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perament, at such a crisis in his nation's history to be free from care. Then, was not Gozo at the front? Mr. Kurukawa might laugh and play all day with the children, but at night, when, worn out, they slept soundly and well, he would lie awake thinking and worrying. At first it was his boy Gozo who occupied his night thoughts to the exclusion of all else. After all, he was a true Japanese at heart, for, although father-like, he scarcely dared to think of the possible death of his son, yet he was glad that Gozo was serving the Mikado. All the papers, local and foreign, he could get he read with avidity. Because he knew it would give his wife pain, he read them at night when she was asleep. After a time the father-love was slowly pushed aside for a greater, deeper emotion, the longing to help his country.

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He was of samurai ancestry, and patriotism was as natural and deep-rooted in him as life itself. Yet he had married a woman belonging to a country that believed that the men of his age did their duty best by remaining at home, the protectors of the weak. So she had told him many times. Often he had believed himself convinced of its truth.

But reading and hearing of his countrymen's sacrifices, struggles, splendid heroism and victories, a wavering, an aching grew within him to emulate their example and give himself to the glorious service of his nation.

A Japanese wife would have shared in his confidence at this time, would have understood his feelings and suffered with him. More, she would have been the first to urge him, command him to leave her.

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Mr. Kurukawa thought he understood completely the character of the American woman who was his wife. Hence he hid from her his feelings.

But his wife was more sensitive than he knew. Her husband's evident depression began to be noticed by her. She sought the cause, and attributed it to the absence of Gozo. She, too, suffered because she was the innocent cause of his exile. One night there was a moon festival in the little town. The people gathered in the river booths and drank their *sake* and tea in the moonlight. She remarked to her husband that more than three-quarters of the festival-makers were women. He had turned about with a sudden movement; then answered in an almost hoarse voice:

"That is as it should be."

So silent and taciturn was he during the rest of the evening that for

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her the festival was spoiled; but even the moon gave not enough light to show her tears. Restless that night, she could not sleep, or slept so lightly that she waked at intervals. It must have been almost morning, when, waking from a restless sleep, she saw the dim light of an andon shining through the paper shoji that divided their chamber from an adjoining room; clearly outlined by the light on the shoji was the silhouette of her husband. His bed was empty. She went to him quickly and pushed the shoji apart. Then she saw the papers about him on all sides. He had not time to hide them. His startled face betrayed him.

She sank down on the floor beside him, terror in her eyes.

"Kiyo!" she cried. "Oh, Kiyo! I understand—everything. Why did you not tell me before?"

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He spoke with difficulty. His hands trembled as he folded up the papers.

“It is all right. I read the news—of the victories. What Japanese could help himself?”

“Oh, but you read it in secret; you hide your feelings from me. Why do you not confide in me?”

He took her hands and stroked them very gently.

“If you were a Japanese woman—” he began, when she interrupted:

“It ought to make no difference what I am. I am your wife. Do not treat me as an alien—a stranger.”

He drew her warmly to him at that.

“No, I will not,” he said. “I will tell you everything—all my thoughts. You know, Ellen, I am of samurai ancestry, and as a young man I was brought up in that school. When I

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became old enough I served for a time in the army. I hold a commission. Later, my father, who was one of the most enlightened of the men of old Japan, was imbued with the new thought. He put aside old traditions and pride. I was forced, so to speak, into a commercial life. Conditions changed for the samurai then. We were desperately poor for a time. They looked to me to redeem the family fortunes. And to do it I had to be taken from one school of thought and put into another—from samurai to tradesman. It was a strange transformation for a Japanese of such ancestry as mine. But I learned to like the work. I succeeded. You know of my long sojourn in America, till I could almost believe that I thought as your people think, and saw things as you in America see them. I seemed to

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be a living example of the evolution of an Oriental mind long swayed by Occidental environment. I called myself American many times, as you know. We came back here. The war, with all it meant to Japan, and the old patriotic feeling aroused, began a struggle with my acquired Occidental sense. Now I know that I never can be other than what I am by every inherent instinct—a true Japanese! I loved you, so I feared to tell you. You married me thinking possibly I was other than I am, Japanese only by birth, but of thought the same as you. That is why I have not confided in you.”

“But I knew it all the time,” she said. “*I* never thought you other than you were. Because you wore our dress, it did not make you of our country, nor did I love you for that, Kiyō. I did not require that *you*

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should become like my people. *I*, as your wife, was willing to become one of you, if you would let me."

For a long time he was silent. Then with a sudden impulse he held the light before her face.

"Let me see your face then," he said, "when I tell you of my resolve."

"Tell me," she whispered; "I am not afraid."

"I must give you up for one who has a larger claim upon me—for beloved Ten-shi-sama!"

He saw her face whitening in the dim light. She tried to part her lips to speak, but no words came. Then she smiled, a smile so full of bravery and love that he almost dropped the light.

"Now I know," he said, "that you are my own true wife—not foreign to me, but as my wife should be."

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Then she spoke: "Yes, as a Japanese wife would be. Oh, Kiyō, I have understood them. It is not because they do not love their husbands that they do not weep and protest when they must lose them for a glorious cause. It *is* brave to give up the loved ones freely, willingly."

He began rapidly to discuss plans for his going, watching her face closely. She bore it all with that brave cheerfulness peculiar to the Japanese woman. Only when he planned the disposition of his fortune in case of his death, did she protest.

"We will not anticipate the worst, Kiyō."

"Is it not best to do so?" he gently interposed.

"I know it is Japanese," she said, wistfully, "but I will always look for

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you to return. In that you can't make me Japanese."

"A Japanese soldier never expects to return. His wife gives him up forever. But I, like you, will have the better hope, my wife. *I* will come back to you."

"It is a promise," she said, and for the first time her eyes were full of tears. He took her in his arms and held her closely.

"It is a promise," he said, solemnly. He wiped the tears away from her eyes.

"There must be no more of these," he said, "else how can I have the strength to go?"

"I have shed my last tear, *Kiyo*," was her answer. "You have promised me!"



## XII

THE "glorious news," as they termed it, was given to the children the following morning. Even Juji was called to the family council, while the nurse-maid, Norah, held the baby in her arms.

Mr. Kurukawa talked of his going to the front as if it were a cause to make them happy and rejoice. His words had the desired effect upon the Japanese children. Taro, Plum Blossom, and Iris were thrilled with pride and excitement. Taro wanted to rush out to the village at once to proclaim to every one the great tidings. His father was going to serve Ten-shi-sama. He was going to re-

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cruit a new regiment from their town and vicinity. And they would all march away, with drums beating and the sun flag flying. His satisfaction and excitement spread to some extent to Billy, who began begging his step-father to let him and Taro go, too, as "drummer-boys," just as the little boys in the Kipling stories did. But Marion stole from the room to weep. She loved her step-father as dearly as if he were her own father, and so in imagination she saw him wounded, or even killed. Her tender little heart was bruised at the thought. The pride and elation of her step-brothers and sisters horrified her. She could not understand it. She cried out her thoughts in her mother's arms.

"Oh, mamma, mamma, hear them singing! Oh! — and papa may be killed, and they are *glad—glad!*"

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She had expected her mother at least to understand, and to weep with her, but to her astonishment her mother put her gently from her arms.

"Listen, Marion! Listen, darling, to what they are singing! Don't you know what it is? It is the national hymn, Marion. Oh, my little girl, be brave, too, with them. There is nothing to cry about — nothing — nothing!"

Taro bounded into the room, his cheeks aflame. "My fadder goin' ride away. Mebbe he leave to-mar-low."

Billy's voice was heard in raised tones outside.

"Then we can see into the chest to-day!" he cried, excitedly.

"Yes."

Taro rushed into the hall to speak in excited Japanese to his father.

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With the two boys clinging to his arms Mr. Kurukawa came into the room.

"There's a little ceremony I have promised the boys, mother," he said. "It was once customary for Japanese soldiers to look at, and often worship, the swords of their ancestors before starting for the seat of war."

"We are going to look into the ancestor's chest," cried Billy; "that old brown thing in the go-down."

The "old brown thing" was brought reverently into the room by careful servants. At Mr. Kurukawa's quiet command complete silence reigned before he touched it. Then he said, in the gravest of voices:

"You children must learn to control your feeling. You exhibit too much excitement. You, Billy, and Taro, both of you, evince the same excitement over a solemn occasion

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such as this, as you would over a festival or a game. Appreciate and remember this occasion, my boys."

The boys, reproved, hung their heads. Mr. Kurukawa then opened the old chest. One by one he brought forth the various articles within it. Some of them were mouldering with age. These he handled with reverent touch. He explained to the family what each relic was after this fashion:

"This garment, my children, was worn exactly three hundred years ago by your ancestor, Carsunora. He was in the service of the Emperor. The Shogun Lyesade set a price upon his head, and after repeated battles with his clan they succeeded in surrounding his fortress at Carsunora. Here for fifty-five days they kept a siege. His brave men preferred death to surrender, despite the prom-

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ise of Lyesade. Day and night the assault was made upon the fortress. Its turrets and windows were demolished. Starvation stared them in the face. Still your ancestor held out. Finally one of the enemy started a fire under the walls, and the brave ones were driven out into the open. Your ancestor was surrounded on all sides. The swords of his enemy pierced him. See, there are the rents in his garments. It is said there were over a hundred wounds upon his body. But desperately and valiantly he fought on, killing or wounding all who came within touch of his sword. See it, my children, bent and rusty, with the very stains of the enemy's blood preserved upon it! But even the most valiant of heroes cannot bear up against a host of men. With his retainers dead on all sides, wounded by the eager

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swords of a thousand enemies, he suddenly signified his intention of committing supuku.

“For the first time in many hours the enemy, out of respect, lowered their weapons. Your ancestor broke his shorter sword—here are the pieces. Then taking the longer one, he thrust it into his bowels, and expired.”

One bit of grewsome history after another he related to the children, listening with awe-struck faces.

Subdued and very quiet the children left the room when the “ceremony” was over. Marion alone had been unable to contain her emotion, and, weeping bitterly, had been sent from the room. Now husband and wife were alone for the first time that day.

“Does it seem strange to you,” he said, “that I should repeat such tales to my children?”

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"No," she said, steadily, "not if they are accustomed to such things."

"Japanese children are told stories of war from their youngest years. That is why they seem impassive when their own family's gory history is unfolded to them."

"But the little girls," she said; "their eyes shone with as great a zeal as Taro's."

"Yes, they are fine girls. You have heard of their ancestry."

"And Taro?" she said.

"Taro," smiled the father, "has a great sorrow. He is too young yet to emulate the deeds of his ancestors. His little heart is almost ready to burst with his longing."

"Will it be the same with our baby?" she asked, earnestly.

"Would you have it so?" was his question.

She thought a moment, and then

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she said: "Yes—yes, indeed. Who would not? Even our Billy is affected."

"Billy has inquired most earnestly of me whether when he grew up he could be a Japanese soldier, and I told him he would have to be a Japanese citizen first. He said his father—meaning me—was Japanese, and he would be whatever he was!"

"And so he will be," said she, earnestly.

"But we will wait till he is a man to decide that," said her husband.



### XIII

THE old grandmother was the first to arise on the auspicious morning. The sun had not yet made its appearance when she opened her shoji and looked out at the dawning.

She dressed herself hastily, and then went to arouse the servants. While the family still slept the house was put in perfect order, and soon breakfast was preparing. When she had set all the maids at their tasks the grandmother returned to the floor above, and entered the room now shared jointly by Taro and Billy. Opening the shutters she let in the light. Then as they did not

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stir, she deftly turned down their bedclothes and drew the pillows from beneath their heads. Taro sat up grumbling and yawning, while Billy turned over on his side, felt about for the pillow, and then slept uneasily without it. Taro, now awake, shook Billy.

"Oh, let me sleep," complained Billy.

"All ride," said Taro, slipping out of bed and beginning to put on his clothes quickly. "You kin sleep when we marsh off with my fadder. No more Port Authur. Soon no more Lussians!"

Billy was out of bed in a minute, suddenly recalled to the fact of what this day was to bring forth.

"I'll beat you dressing," said he.

Meanwhile, Madame Sano was helping the little girls with their toilets.

Iris was standing patiently while

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

her hair was being dressed in an elaborate mode. Plum Blossom, her round, fat little face still flushed with sleep, was sitting on the floor drawing on a white stocking.

A maid was helping Marion. The latter's hair was arranged in the same fanciful mode as her step-sister's.

"Grandmother, please let me wear my new cherry-blossom kimono to-day," coaxed Iris.

"You must wear your white," said the grandmother; "all wear white to-day. You must look your best. Now, Plum Blossom, let O'Chika arrange your hair."

"Please, grandmother, tie my obi. You do it so beautifully," begged Marion.

Smiling, Madame Sano pulled and twisted the little girl's kimono into correct shape, wound the sash about

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

her, and tied it in a huge bow behind. Then she slipped a fan and two little paper handkerchiefs into the sleeves of each little girl. Now that they were all ready, she took occasion to give them a short lecture.

"You mus' wear sweed, smiling face to-day, liddle gells. No more cry."

"Oh, grandmother, how can I help it?" asked Marion, a catch in her voice which already betokened the forbidden tears. "I'd better stay home. I *can't* see father go away to that awful, cruel war."

"When Gozo went away I nebber cry one tear!" said Plum Blossom, fervently.

"I no cry needer," said Iris; "and when he say good-bye I laff and wave both these han's like this."

"She have flag in both those han's," explained Plum Blossom.





A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"She have *my* flag also; so when I also wave *my* han's I have no flag, but jus' same—me—I laff, too."

"Oh, didn't Gozo feel bad to see you laughing at him like that?"

"No," cried Plum Blossom, indignantly. "My! how good he feel. He hol' himself like thisaway." She threw out her chest in illustration. "And when he reached corner of street he put Juji down."

"Juji? Where was he?"

"Gozo carry him on shoulder all way down stleet. And Taro he too marsh ride nex' his side with Gozo. Then when Gozo reach that corner he put Juji down and he putting his han' on his head thisaway, and then he turn quick, and thad was las' time we saw Gozo."

Her voice fell at the end, and her face had now a distressed expression.

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"*I* only cry after he gone way," admitted Iris.

Plum Blossom turned on her fiercely.

"If you talk of thad cry *now*, you goin' cry again, and to-day you *mus'* smile, accounts our fadder marshing, too."

Iris smothered all signs of tears.

"*Me?* *I* cry to-day?" she said. "Never I cry."

"Did Juji cry?" asked Marion, curiously, mindful of the child's talent in that direction.

"No, Juji never cry, even after Gozo gone. Everybody cry then 'cept Juji. He forget he god brudder naime Gozo."

"Now all honorably go downstairs and sedately wait for your august parents to descend for breakfast."

Later the grandmother dressed lit-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

tle Juji, and the baby, too, for the lazy Norah could not see the necessity for such early rising, and grumbled at being awakened.

"Shure an' wot time is it he's afther goin' away?" she inquired of the grandmother.

"Your master go away at three o'clock," said the grandmother, quietly.

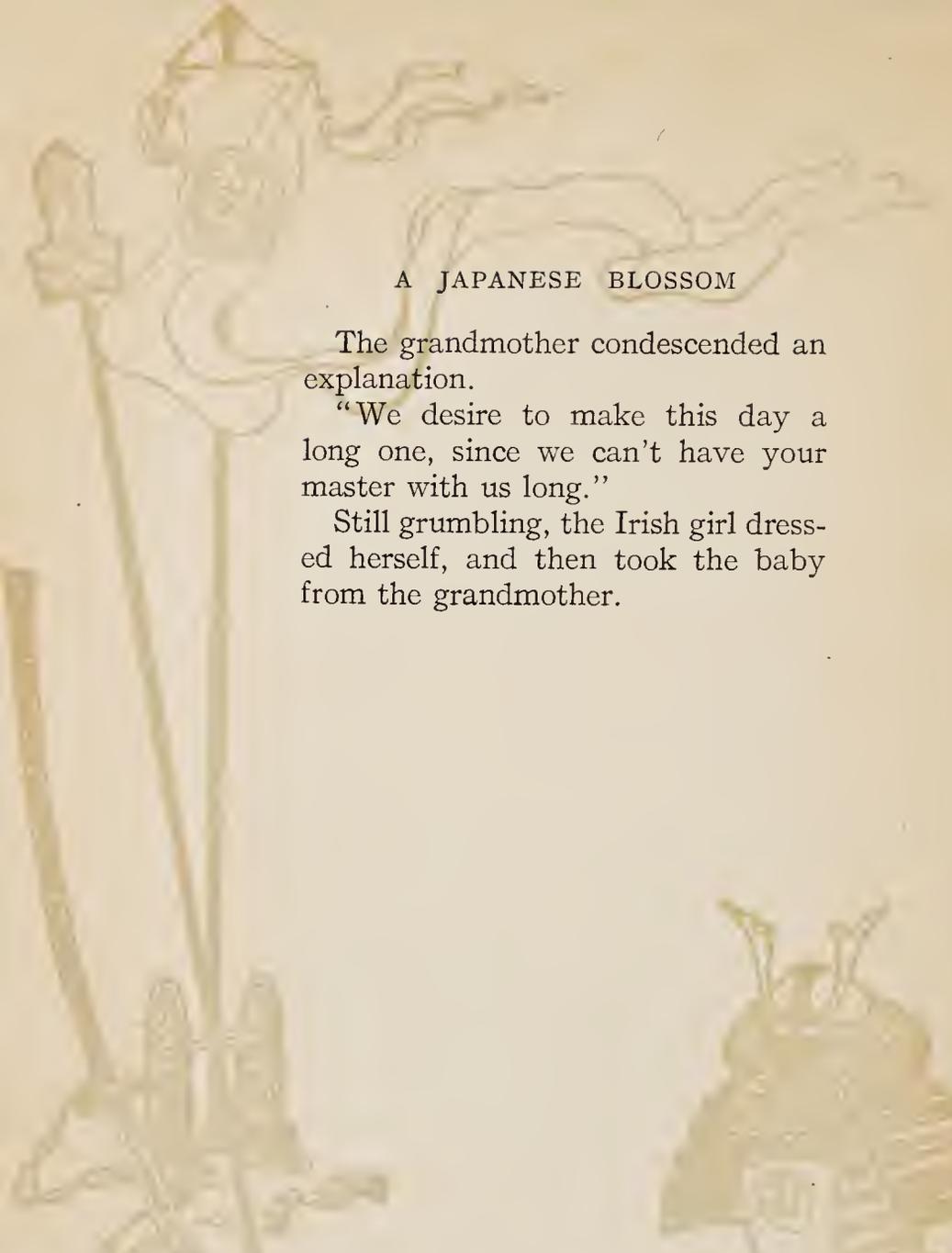
"Thray o'clock! In the afthernoon, may I arsk?"

"Certainly."

"And you get up at thray in the morning because he laves at thray in the afthernoon?"

The grandmother did not answer. She was unused to such questioning from her own servants, and found it hard to tolerate it from the Irish girl. But Norah persisted:

"What's the sinse of getting up before you're awake?"

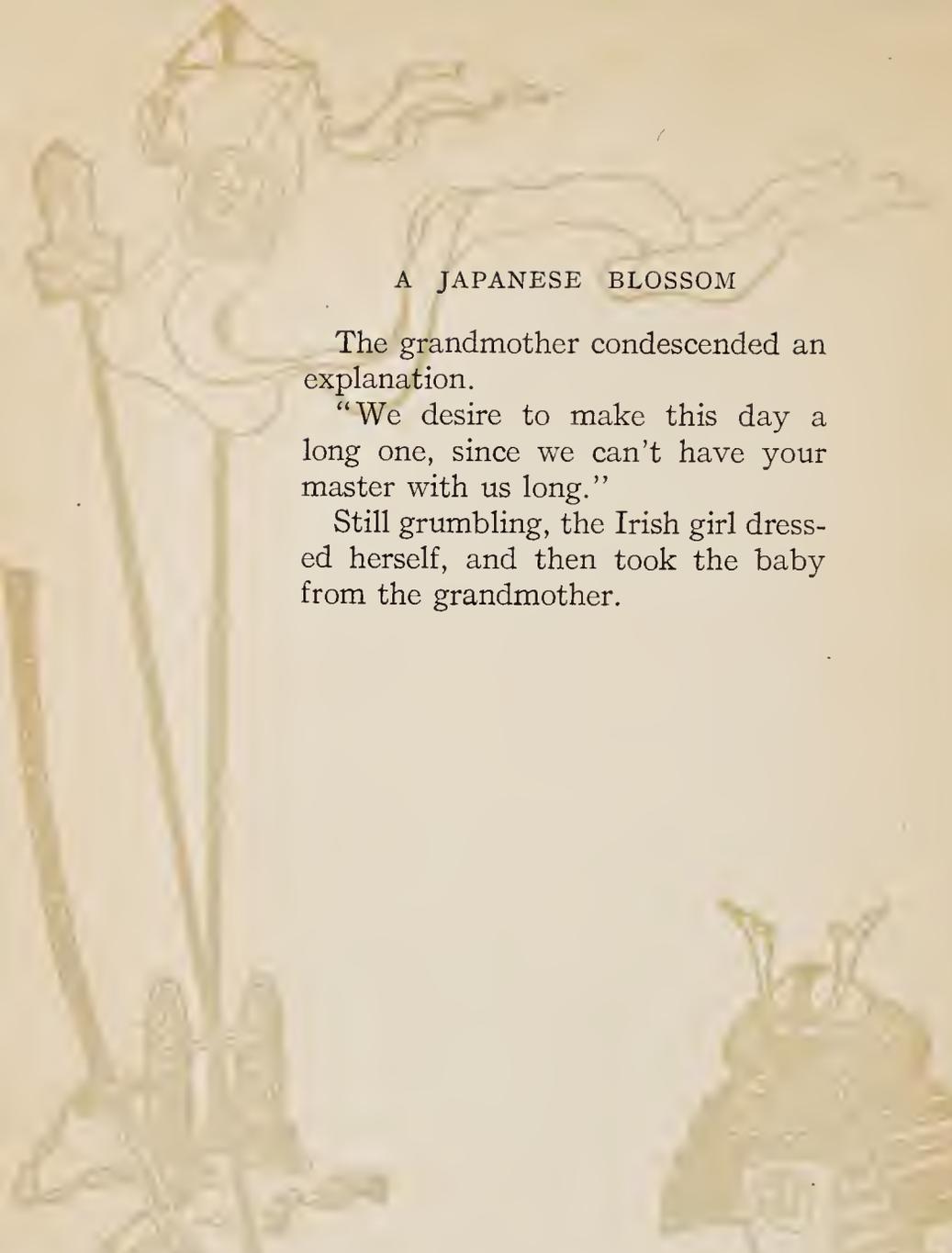
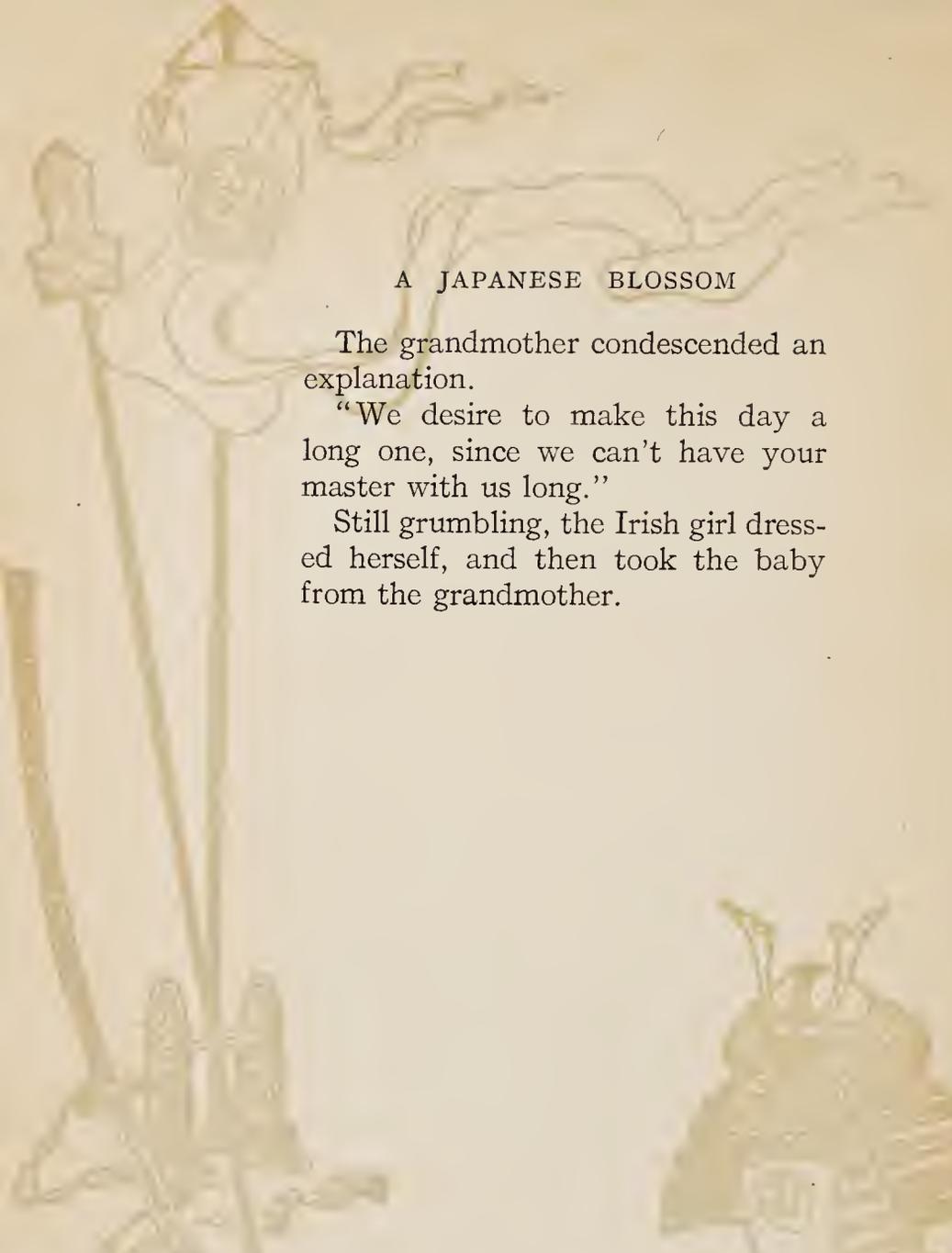
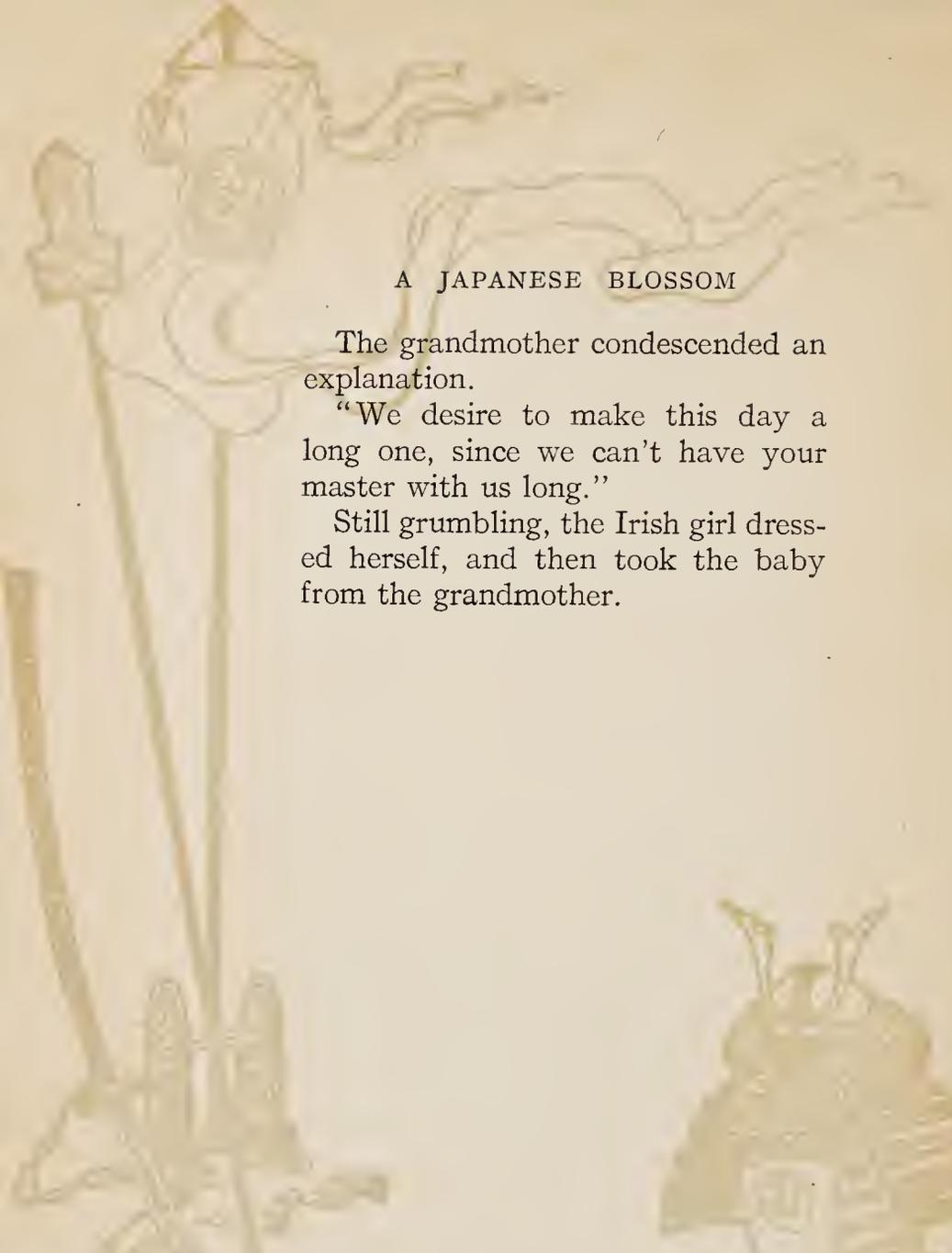
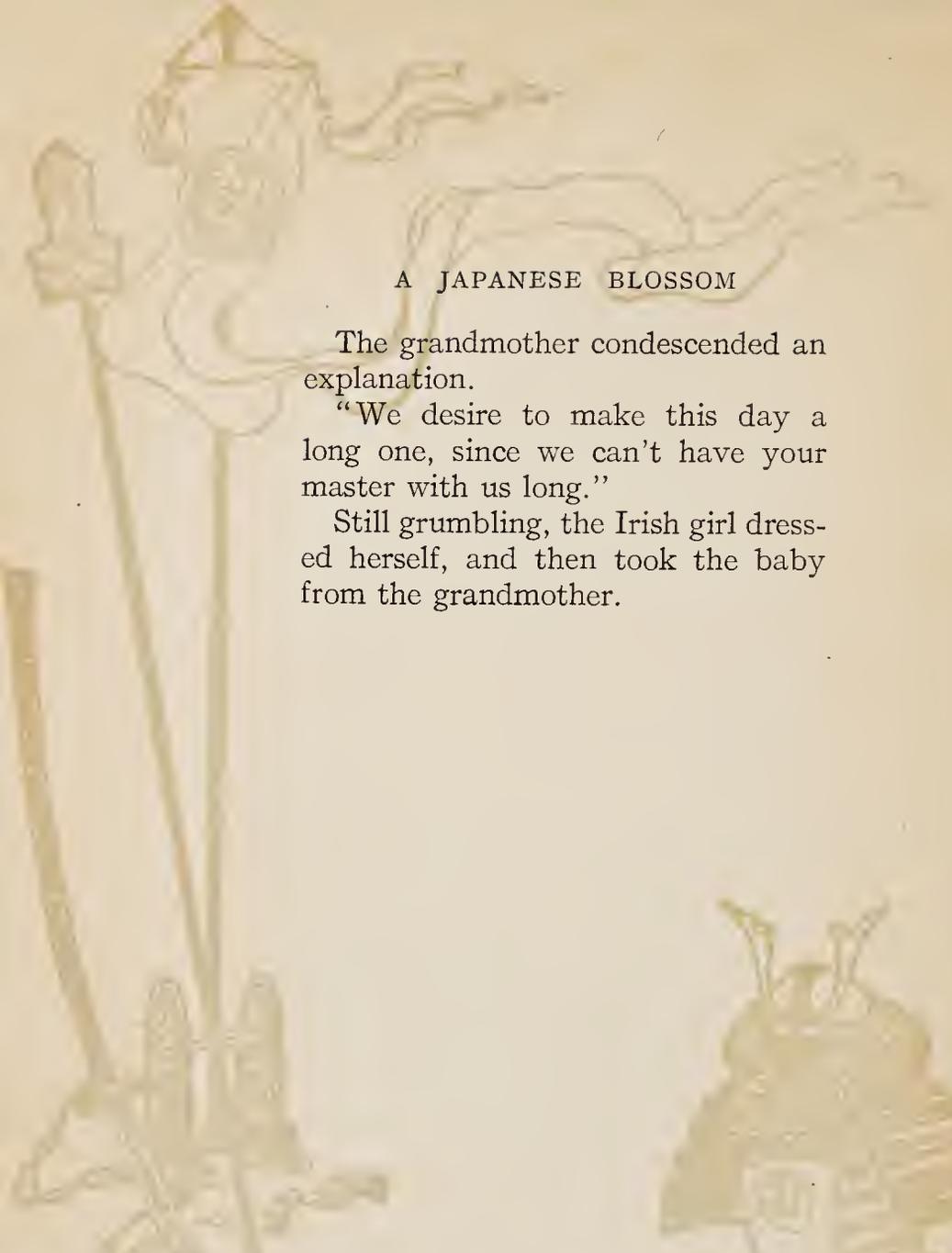
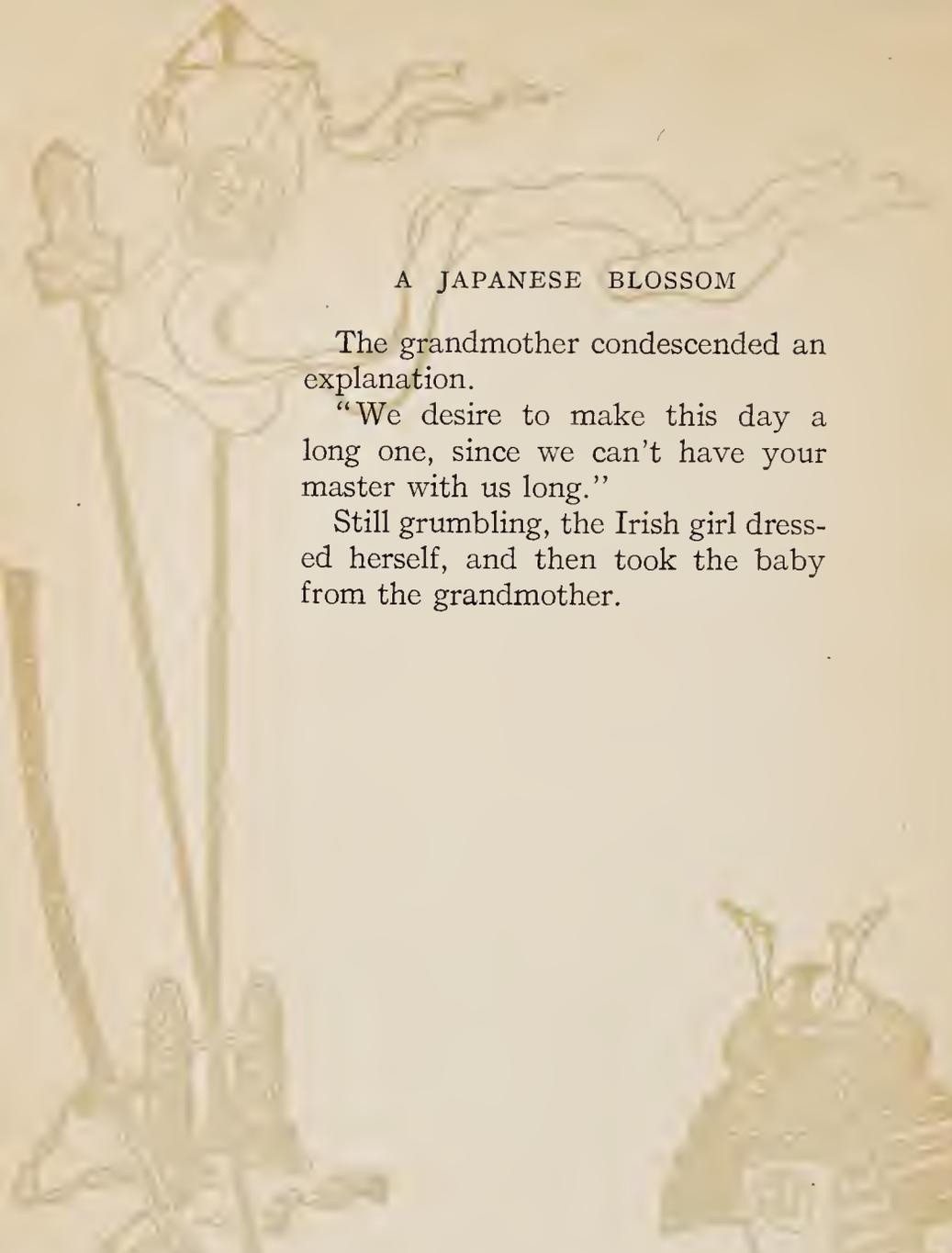
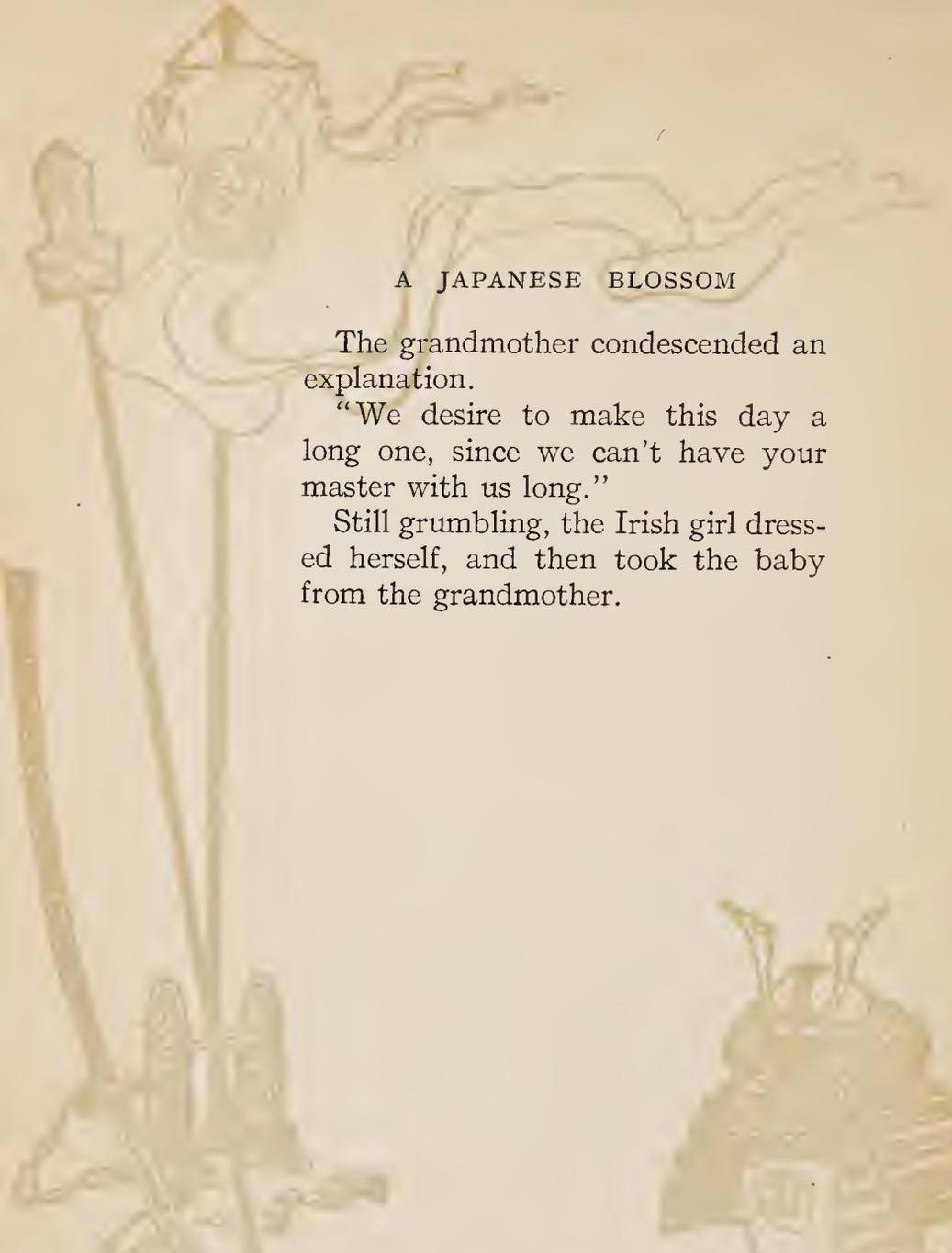
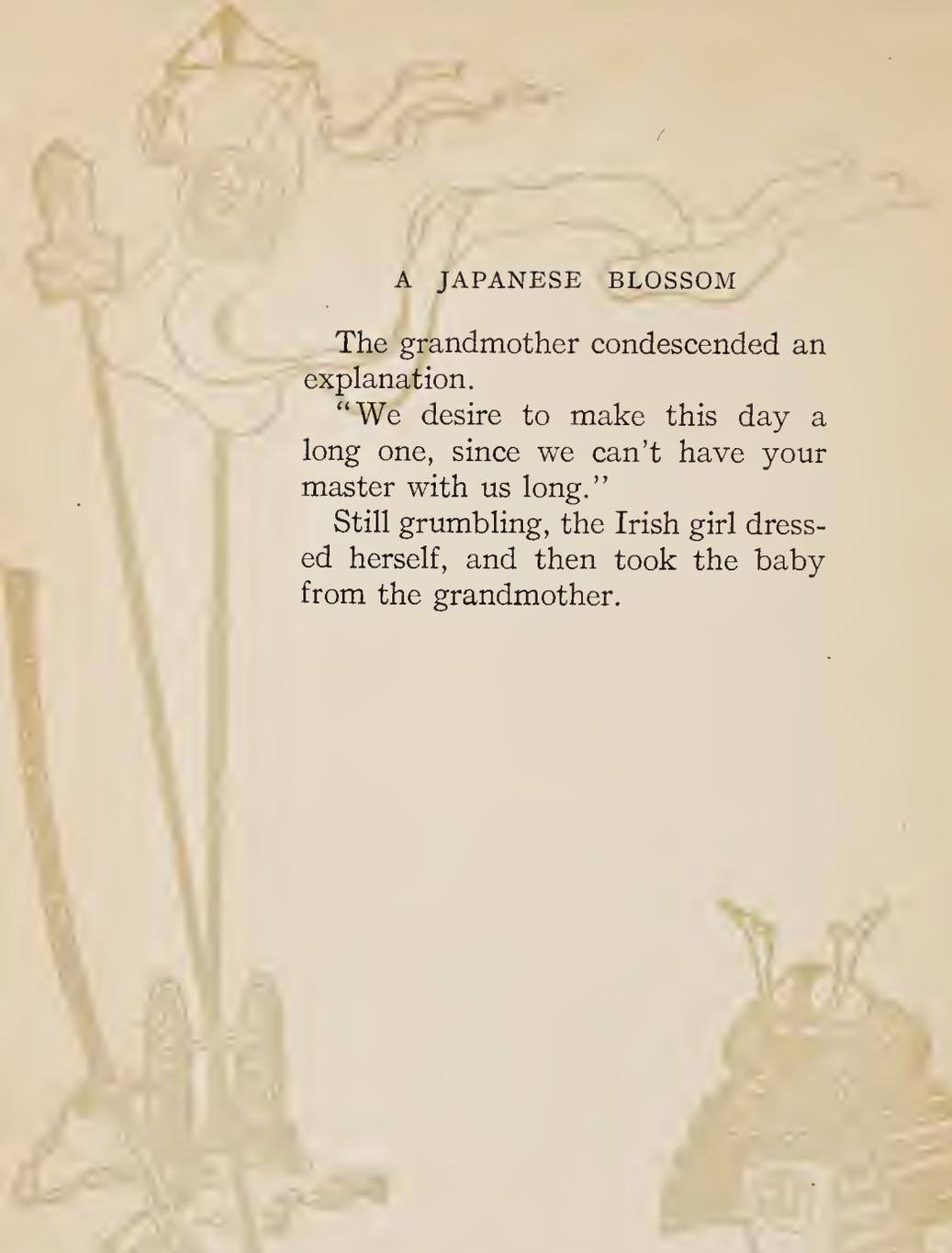
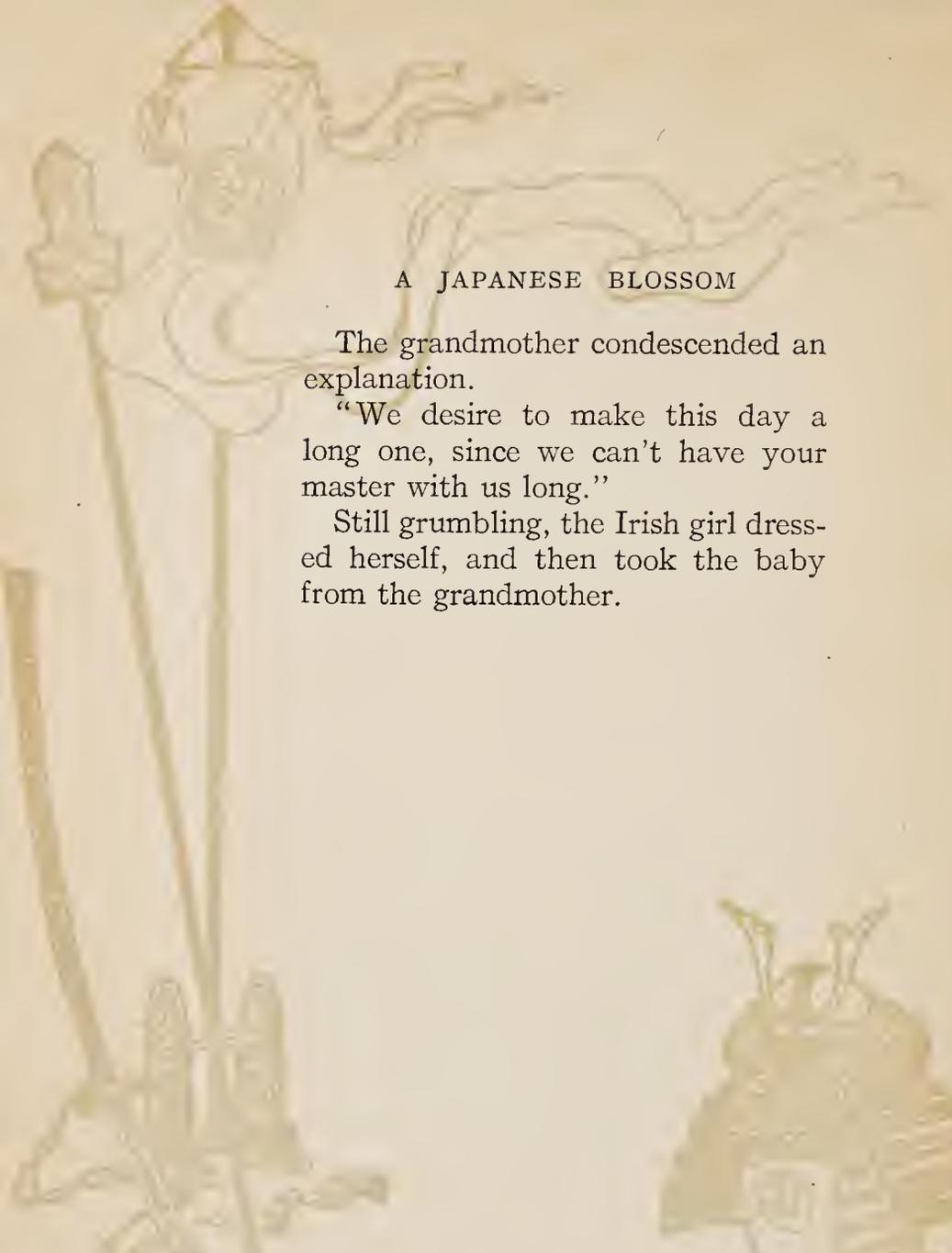
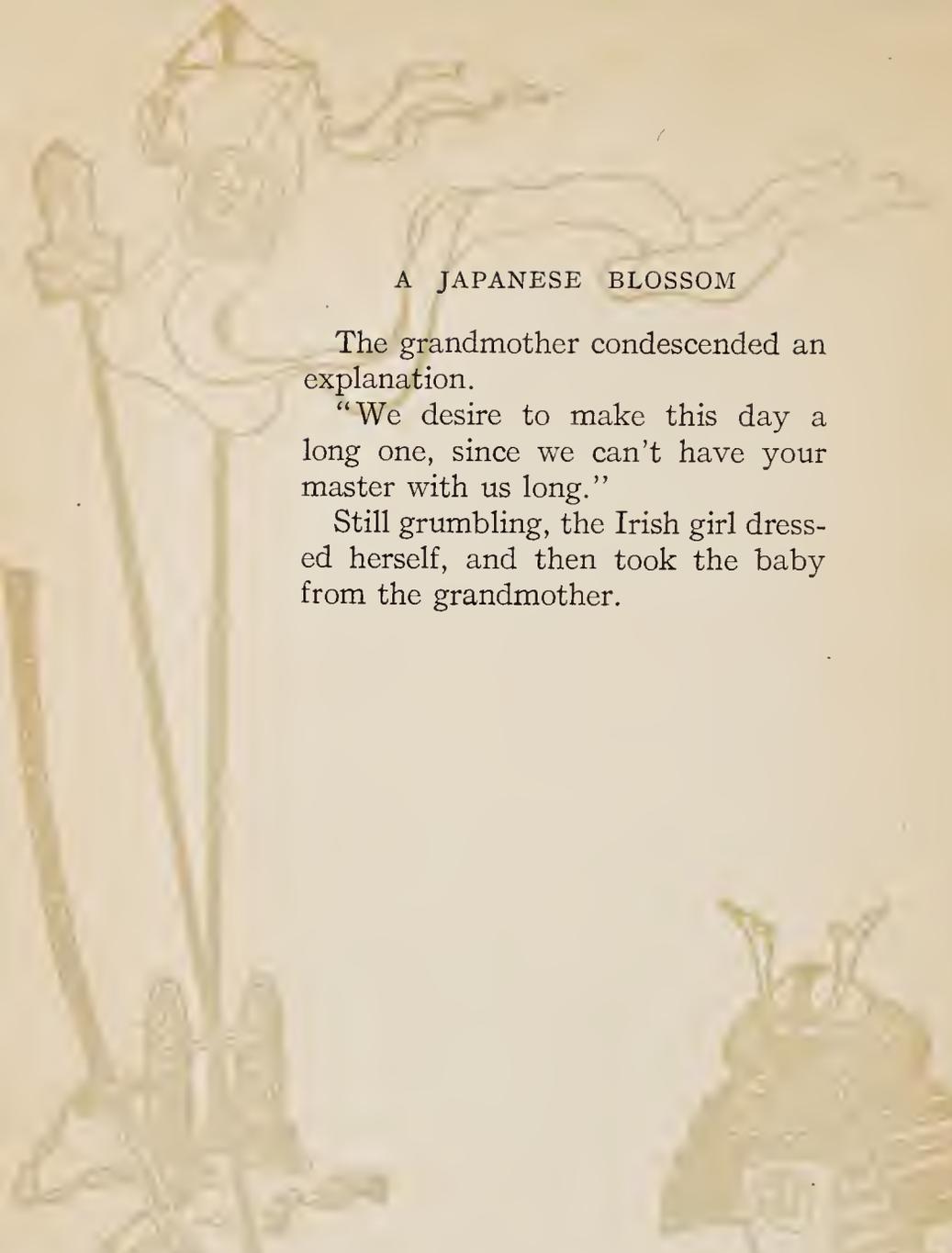
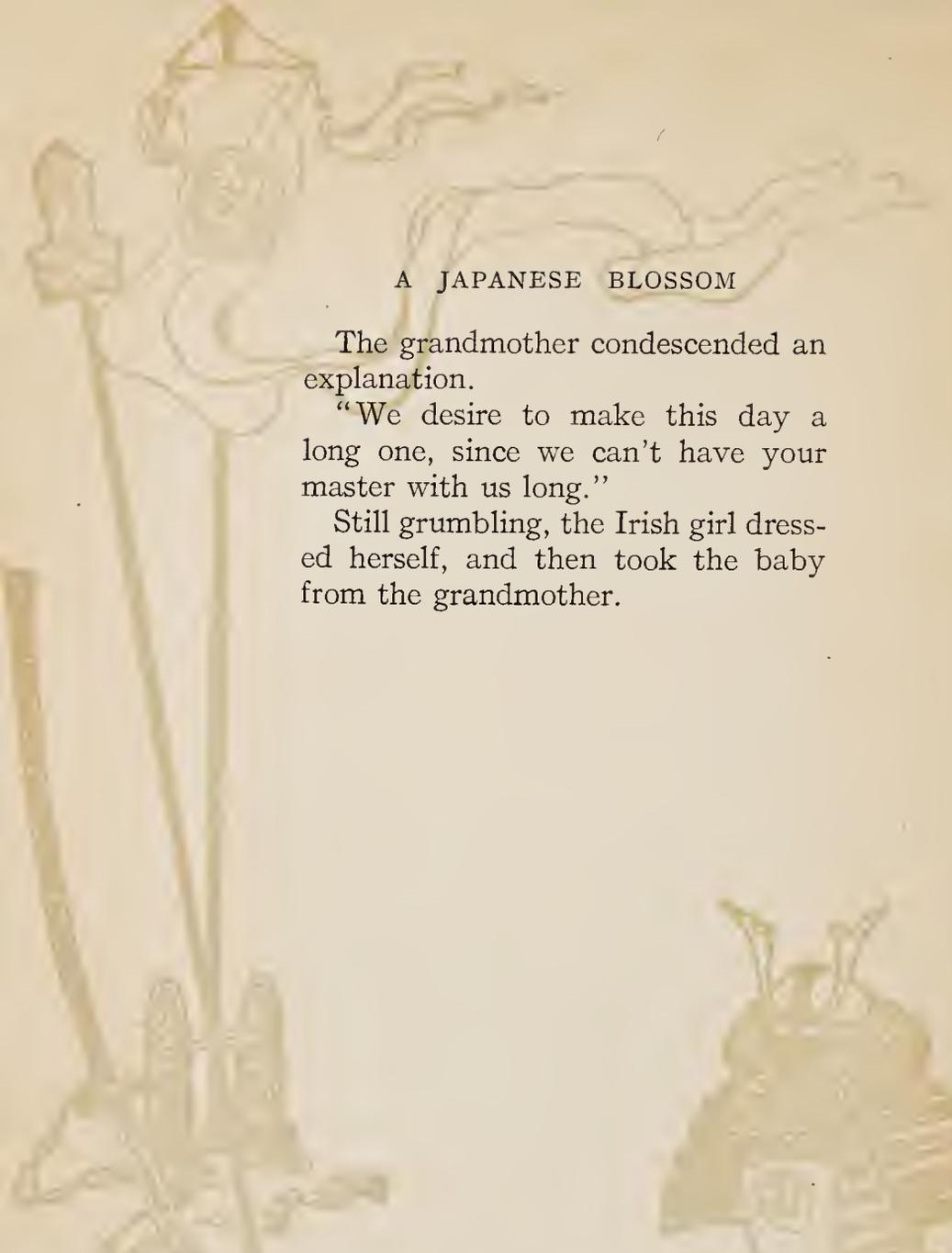
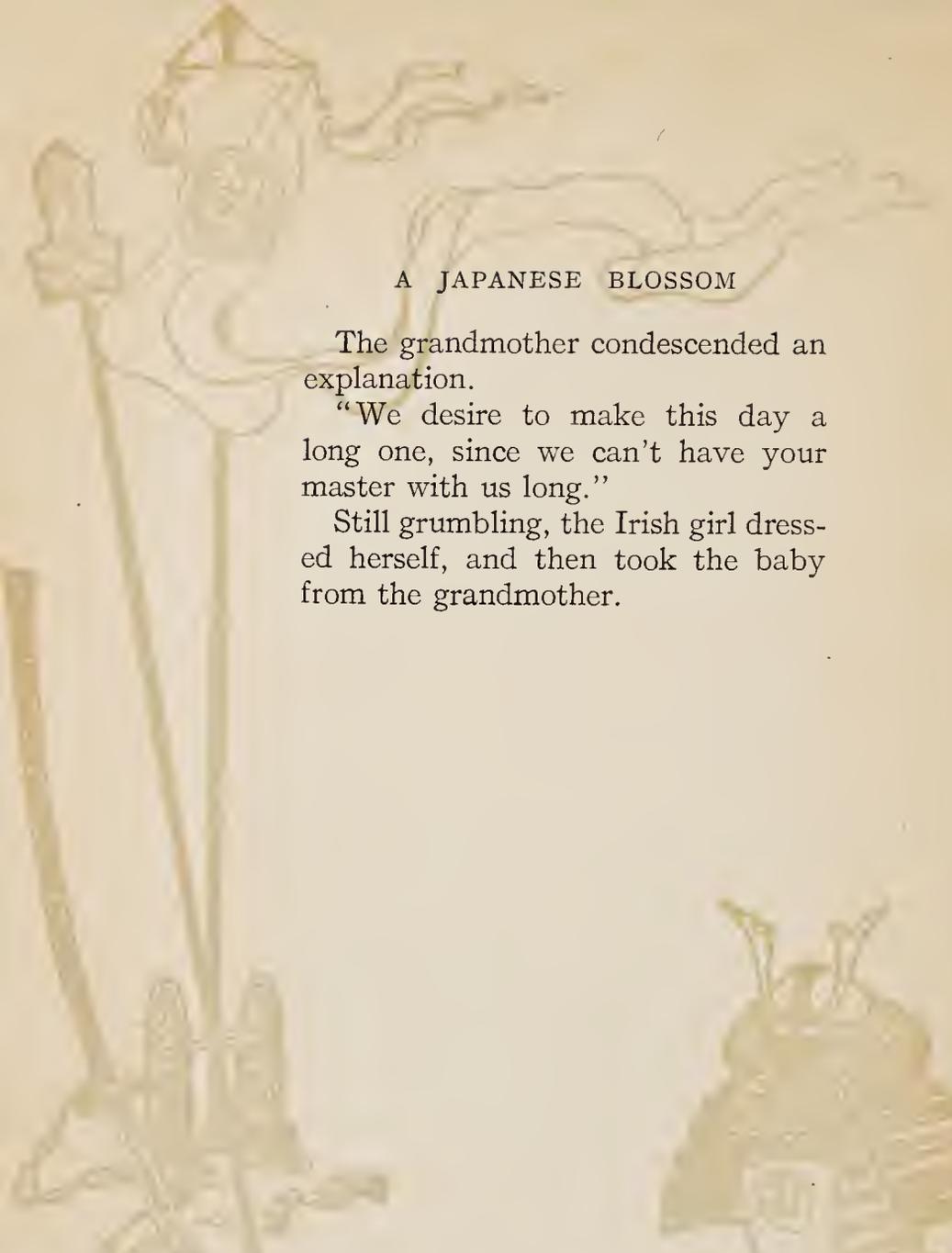
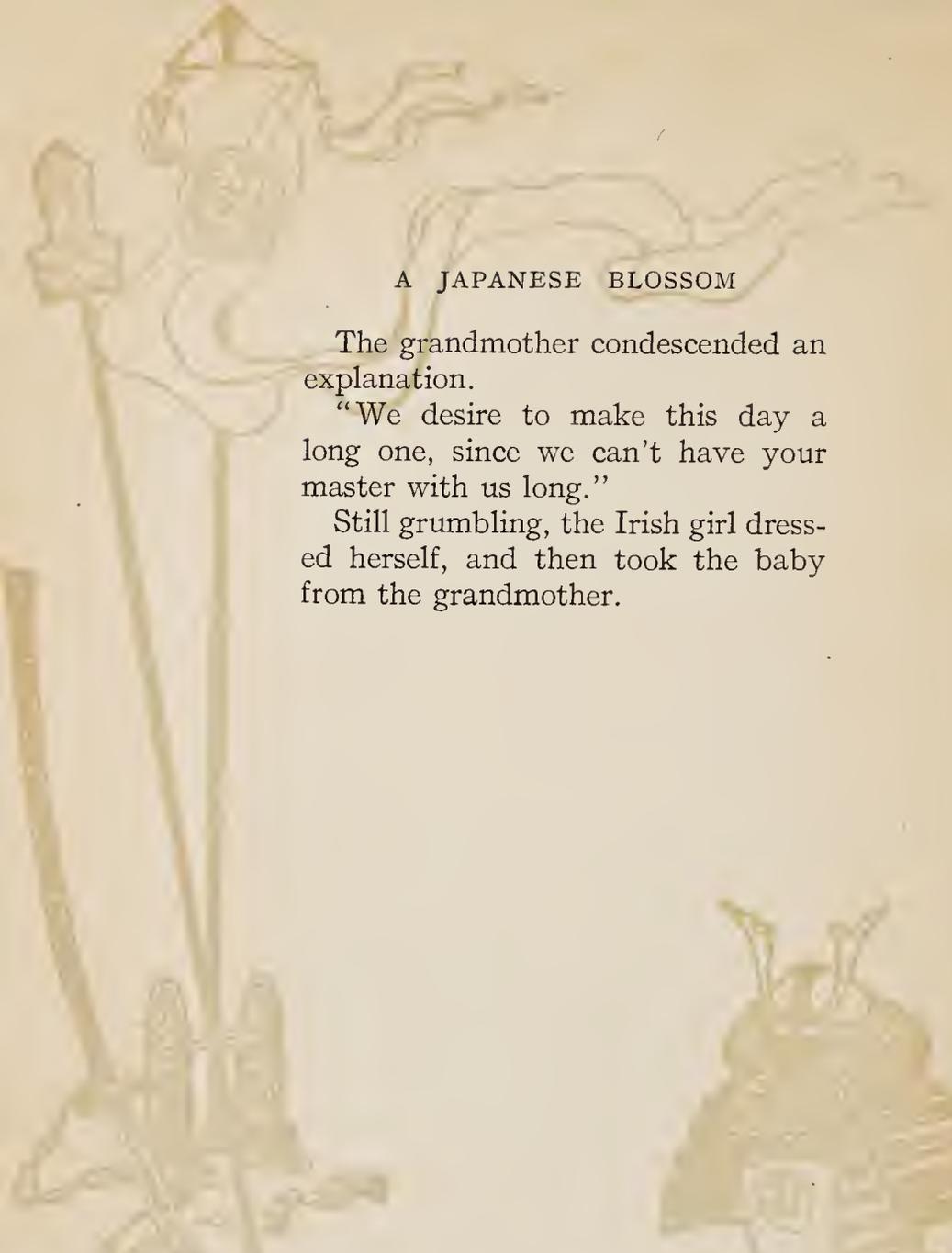
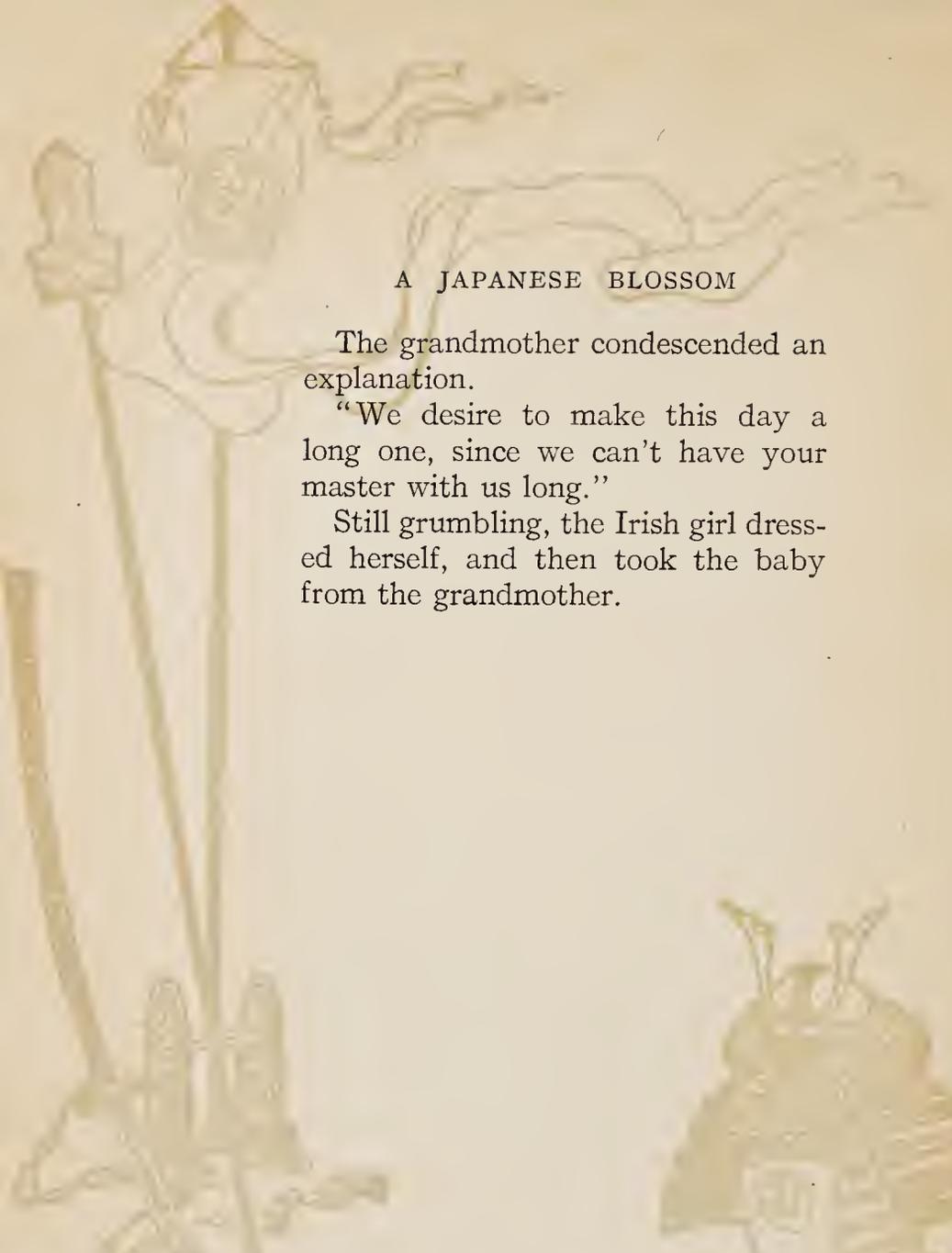
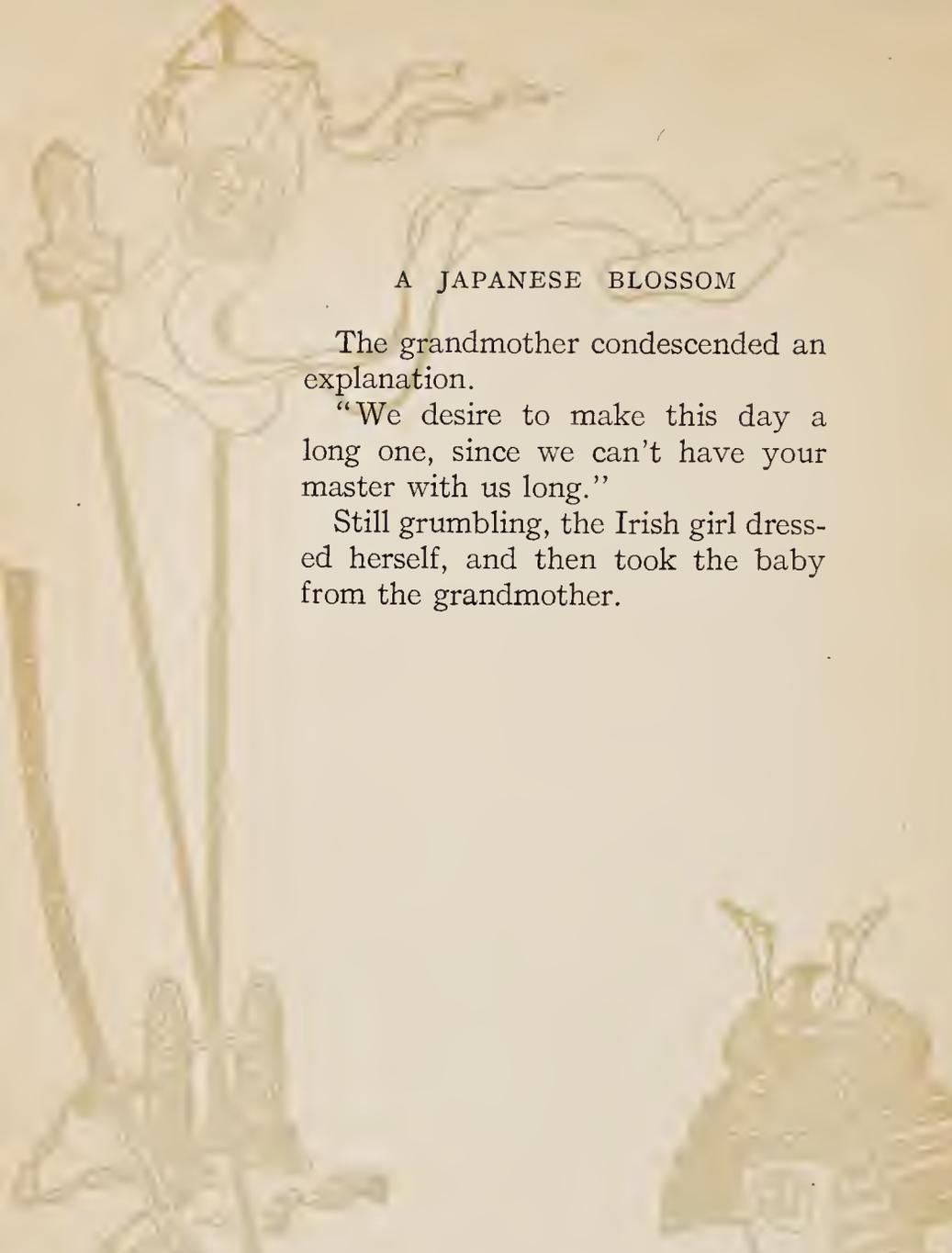
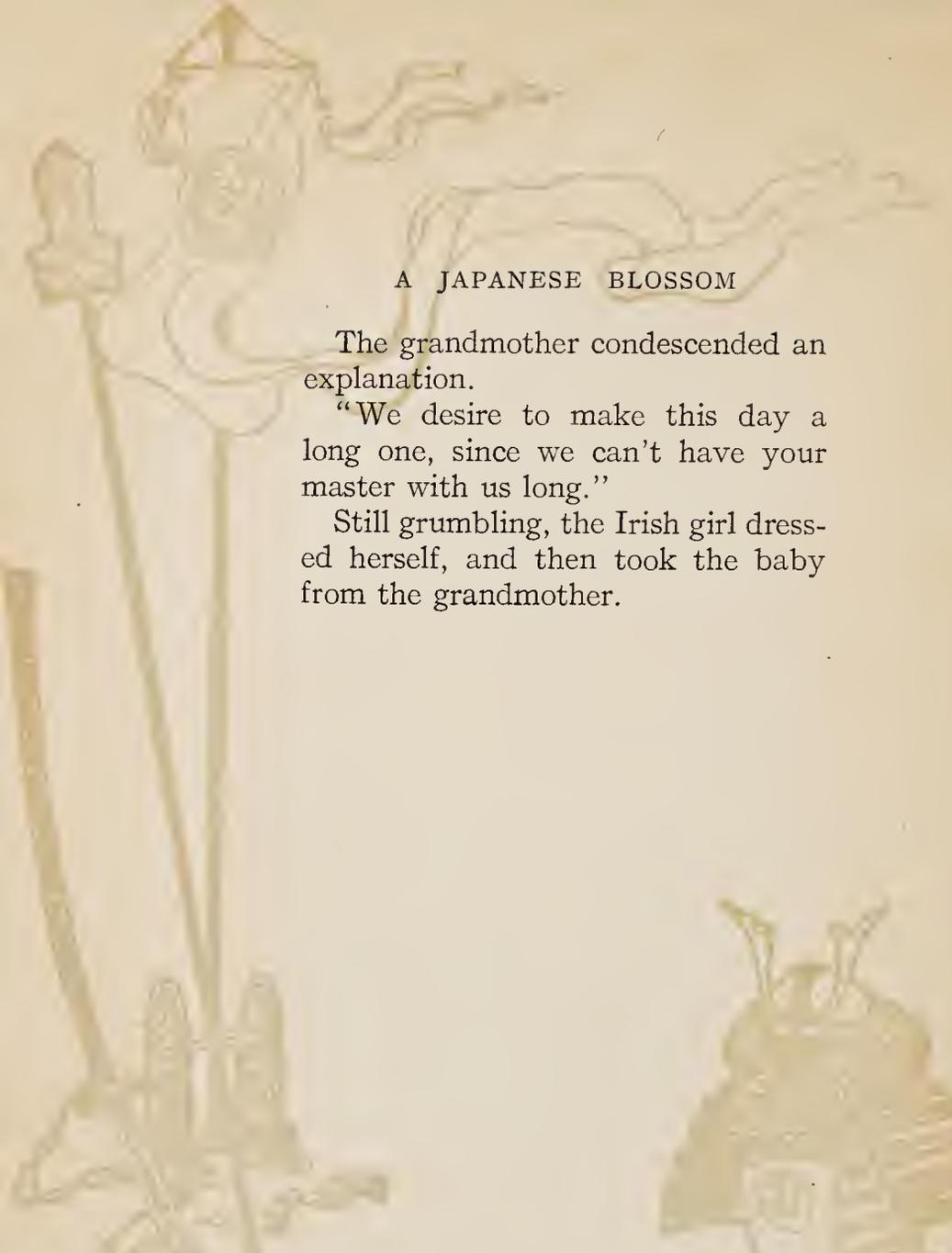
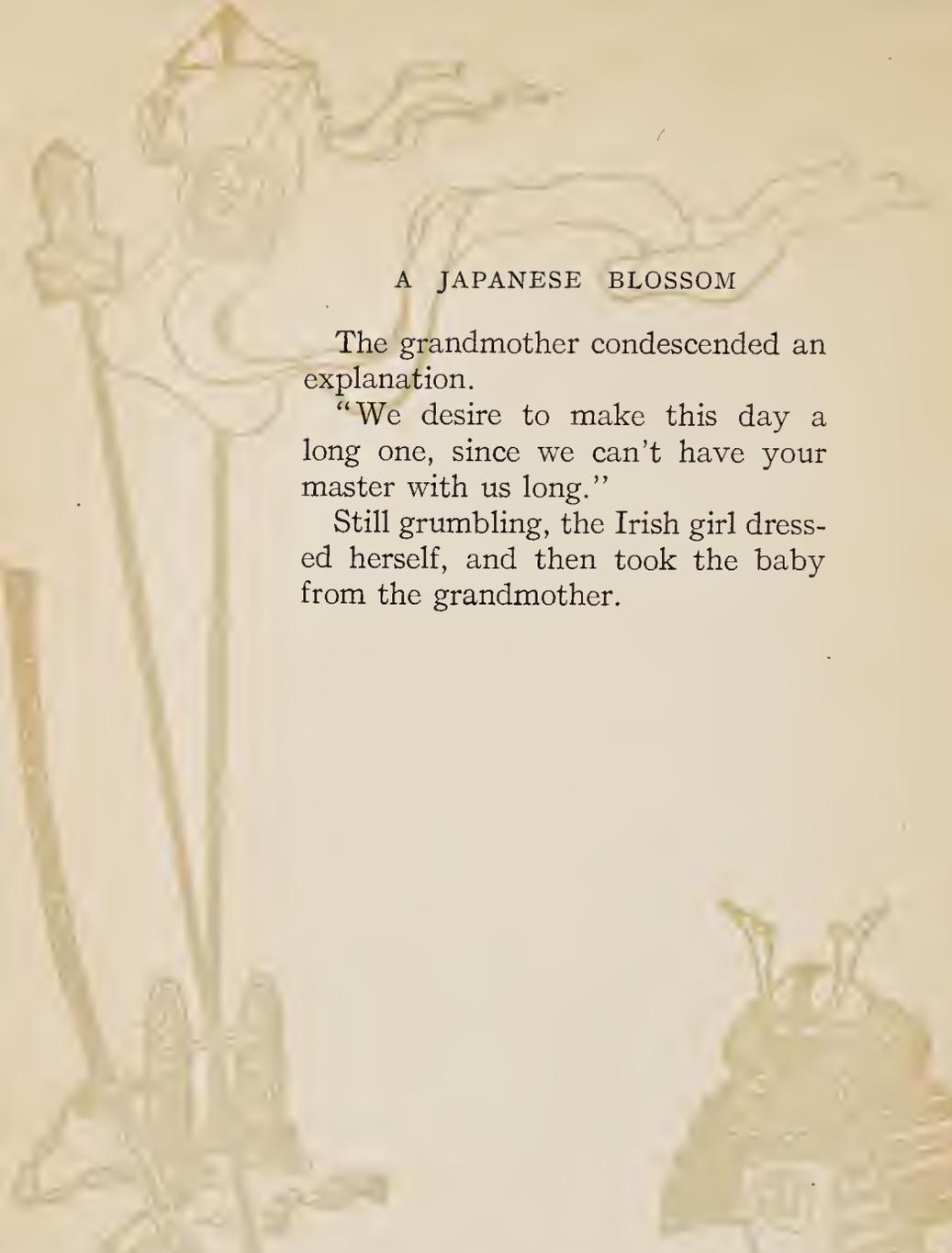
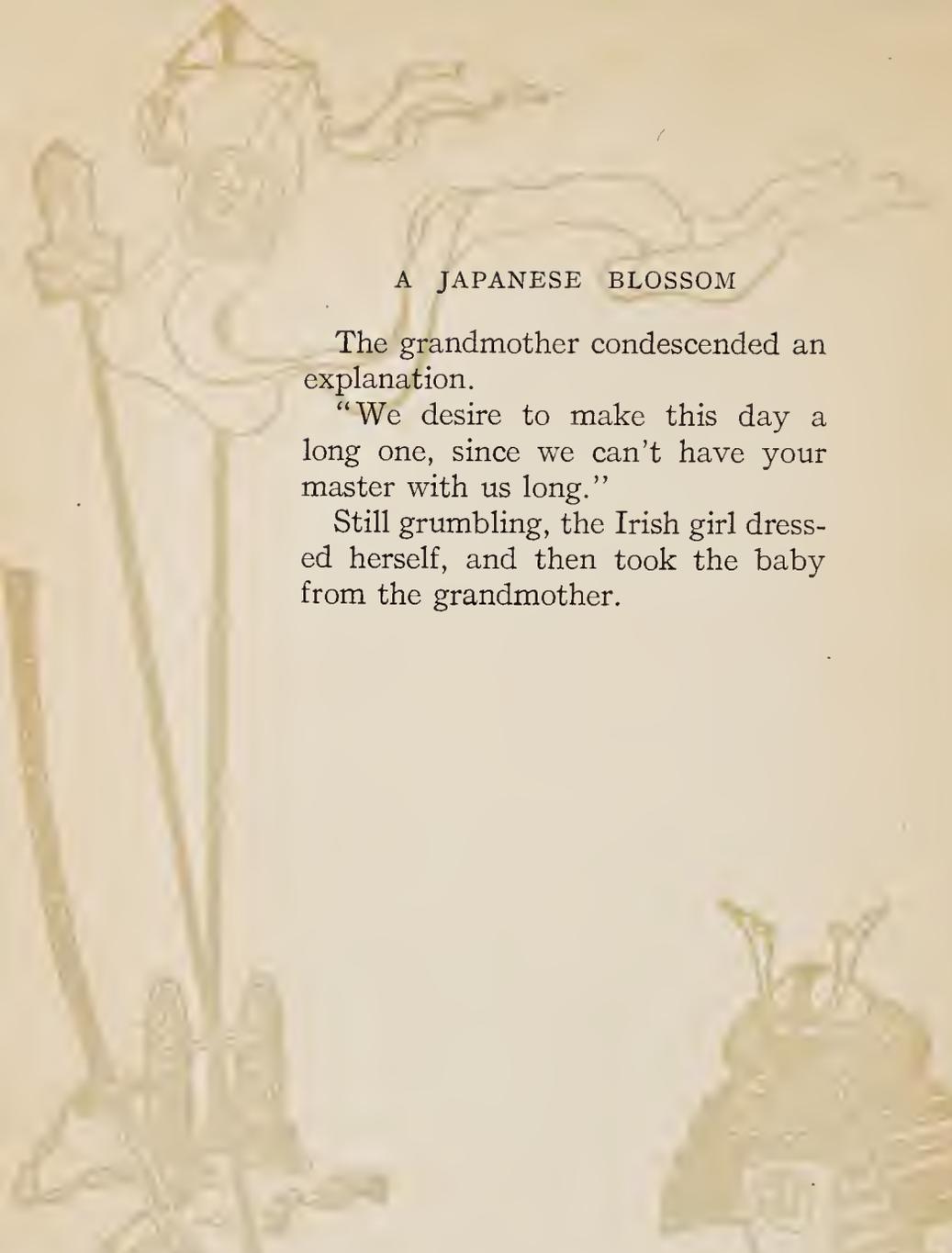
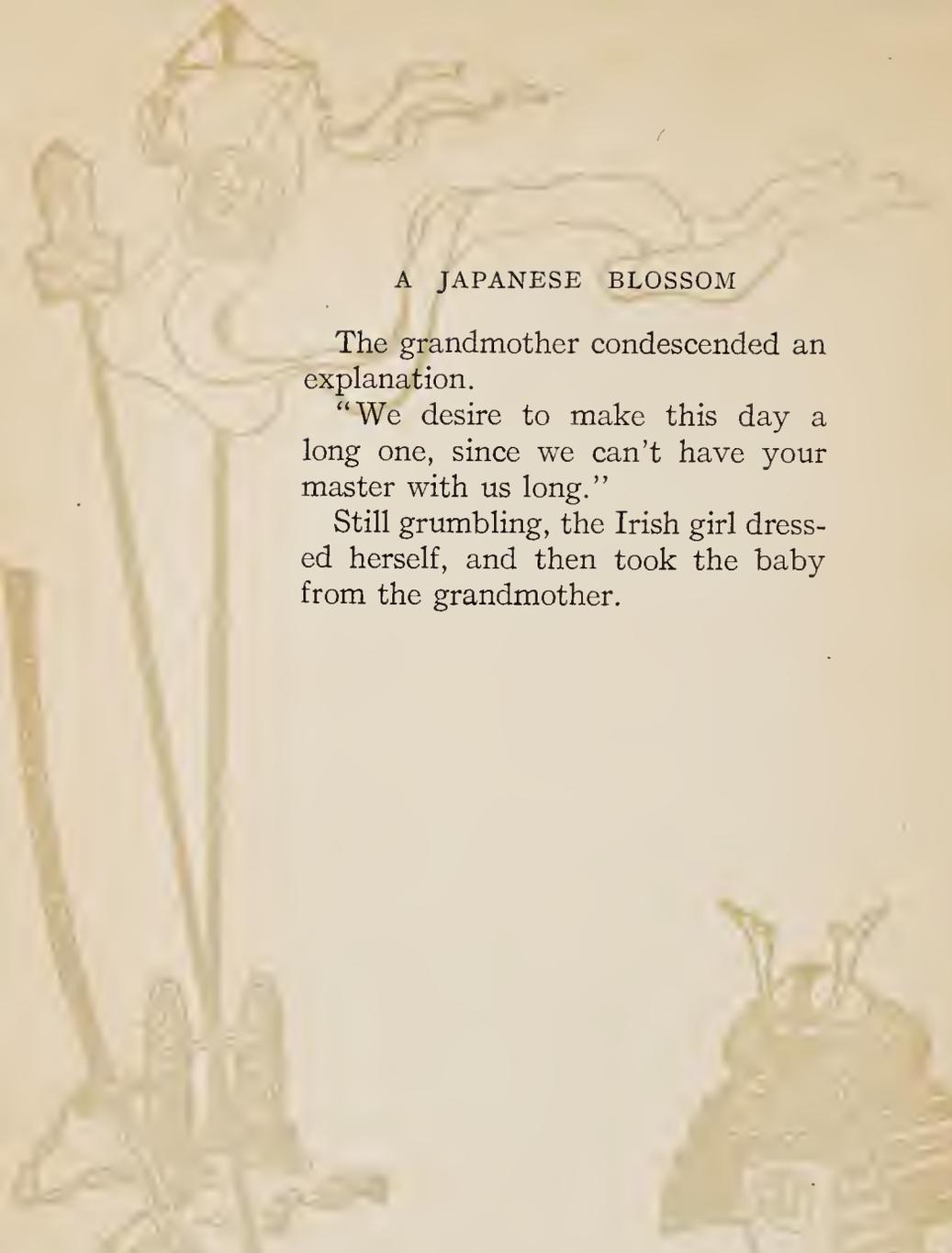
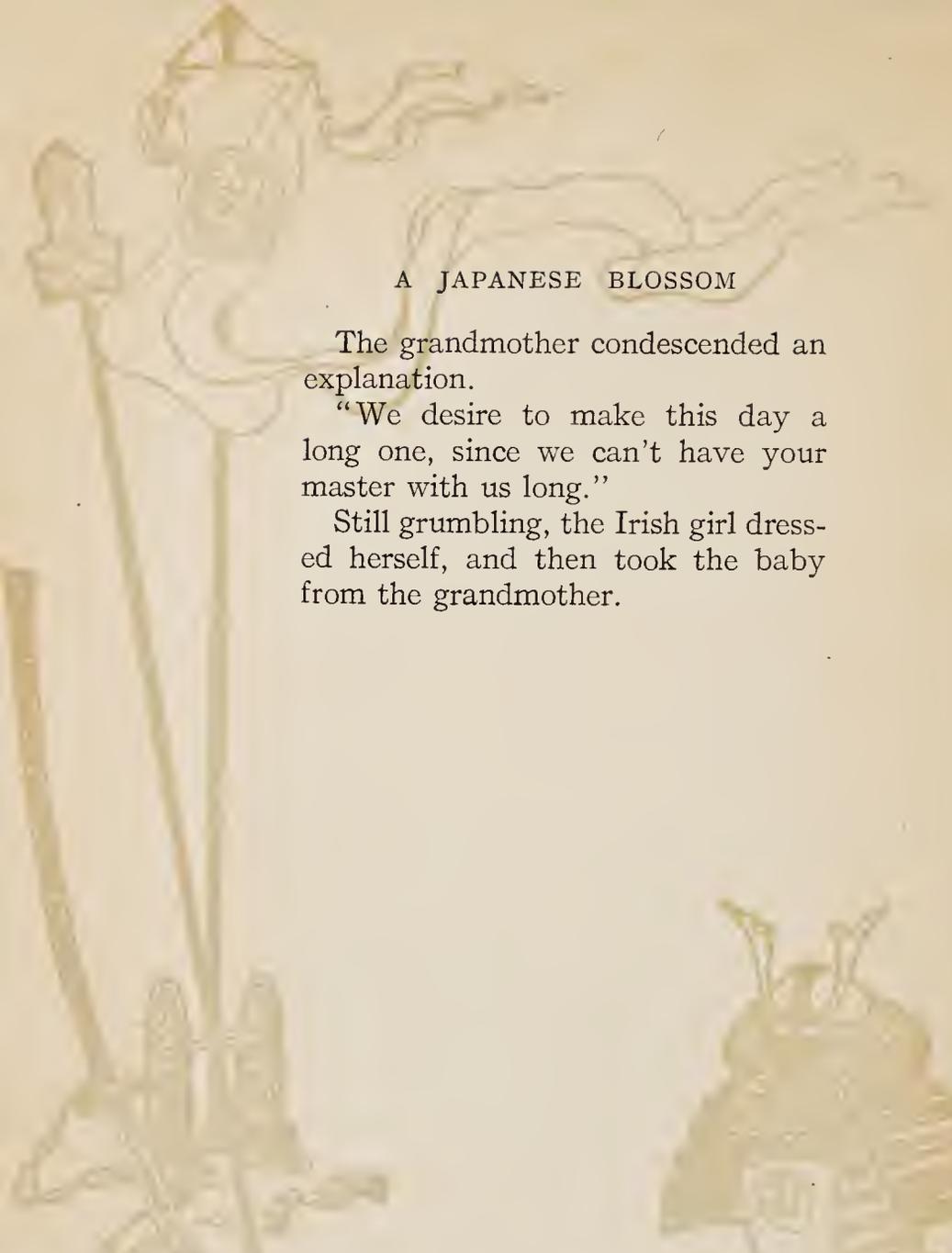
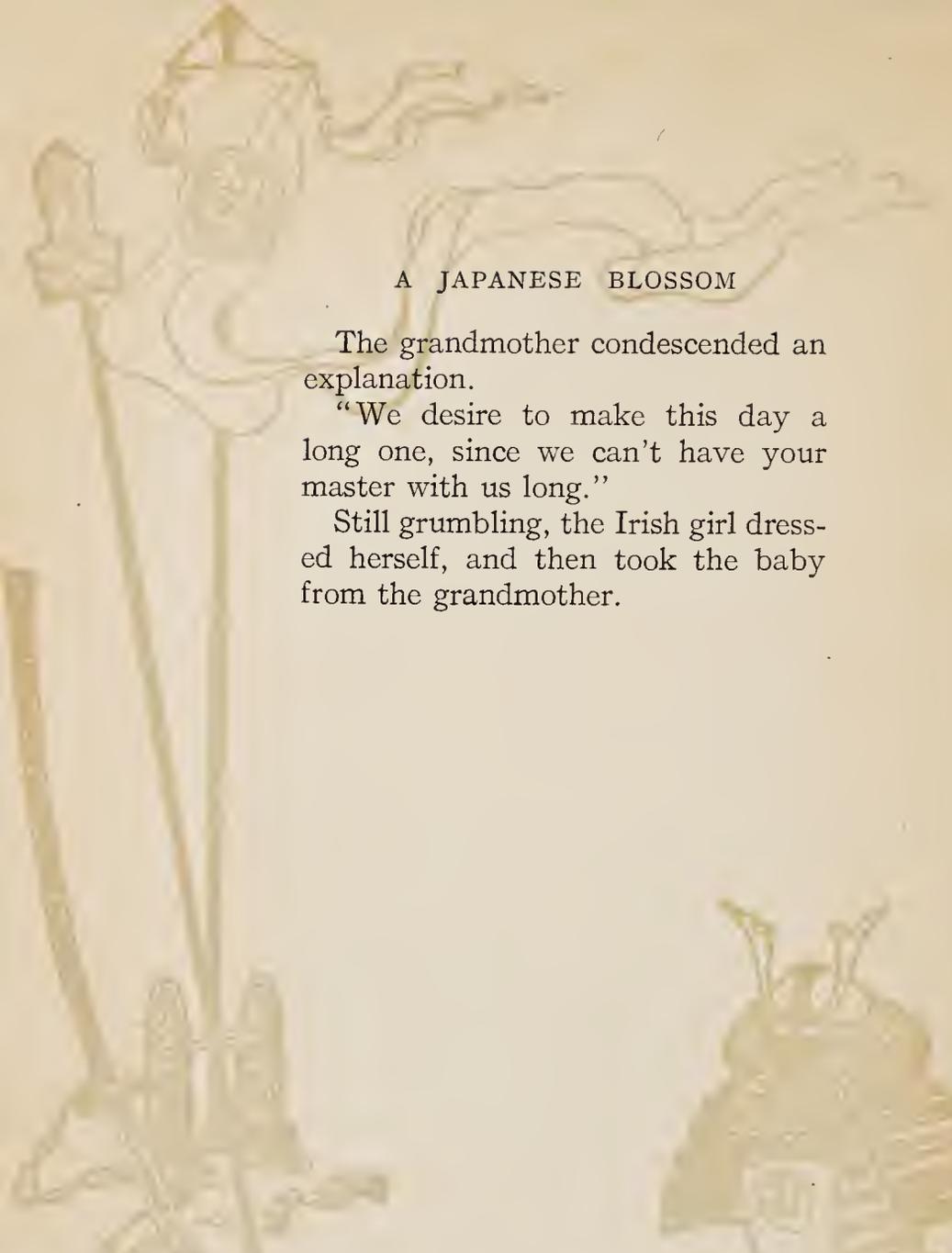
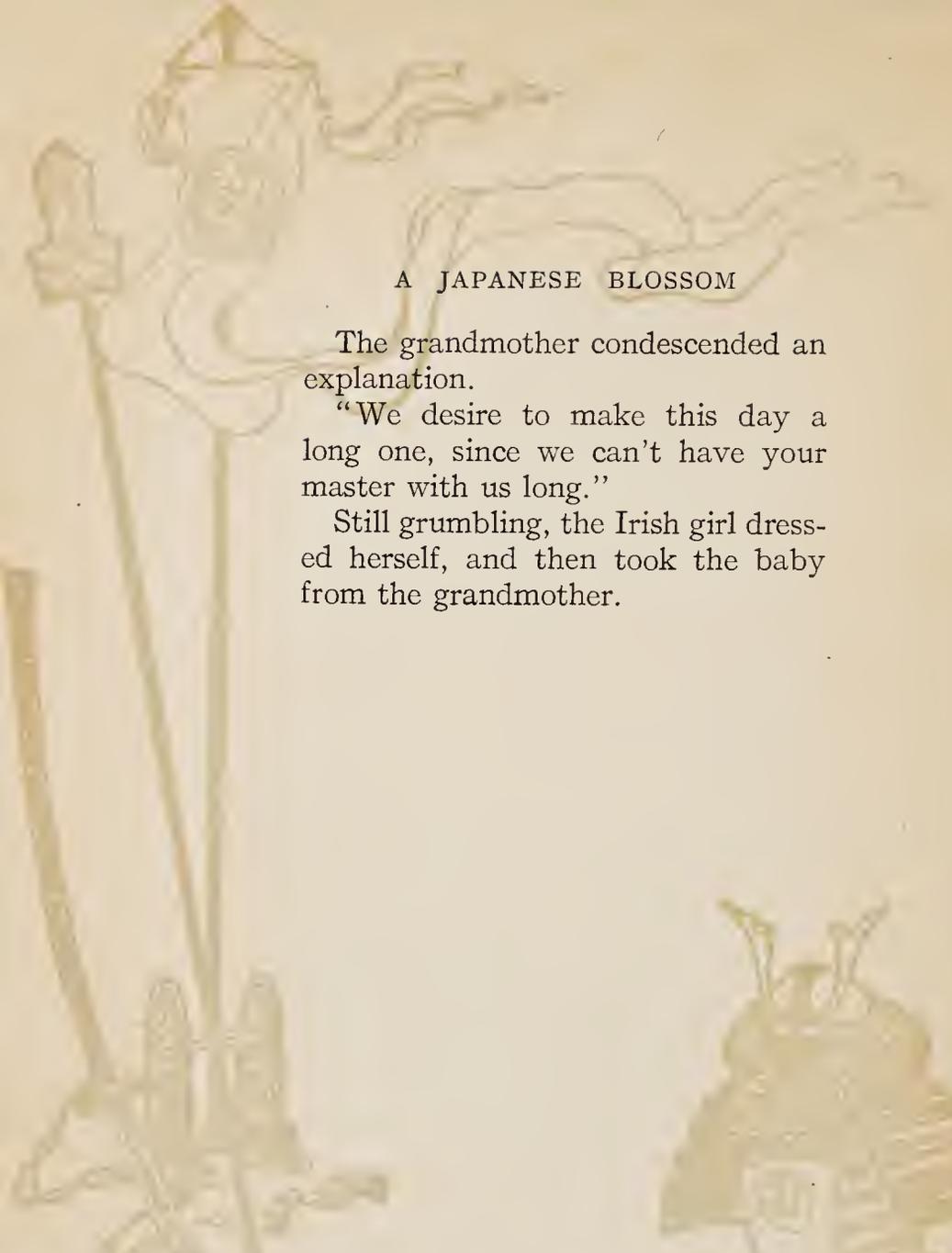
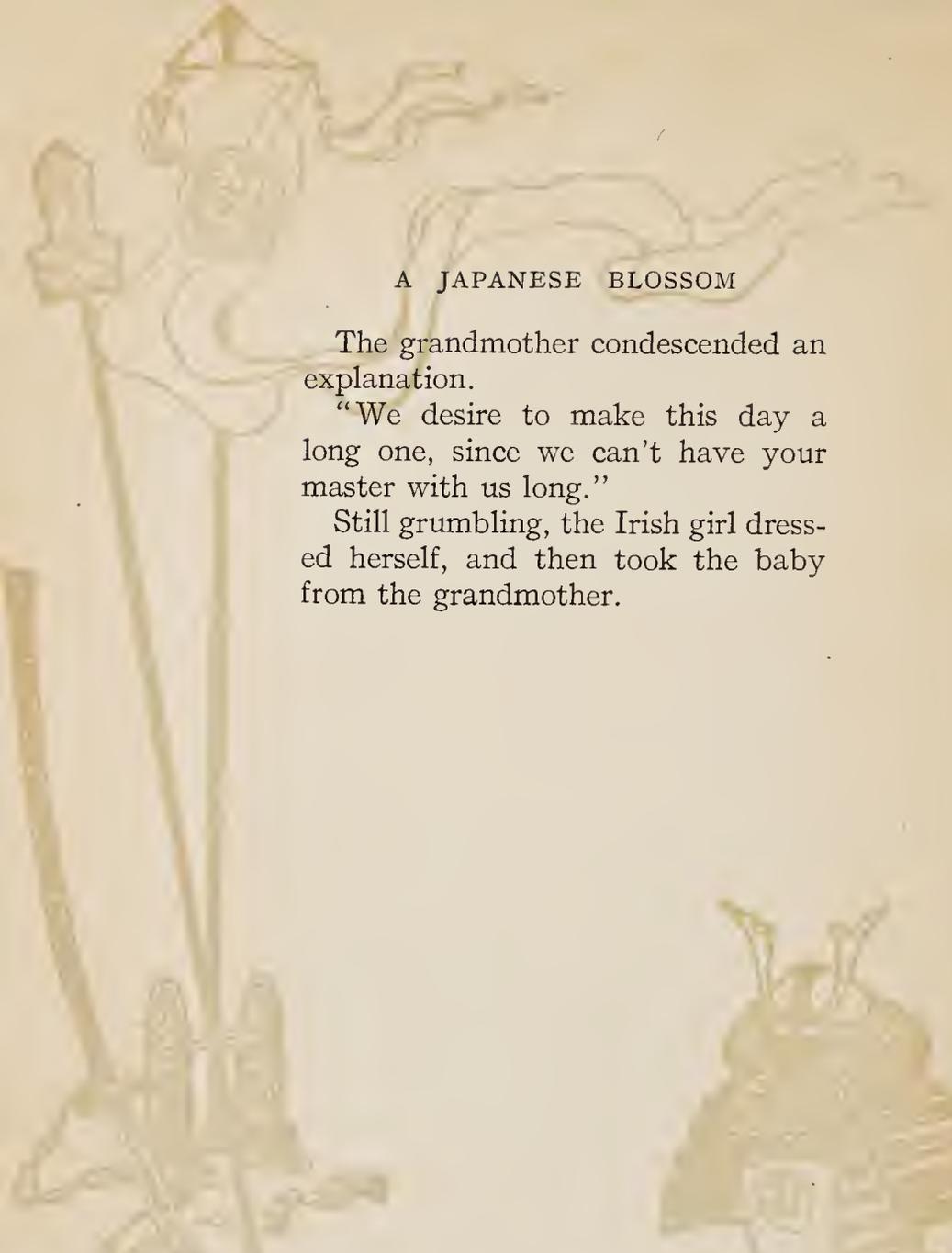
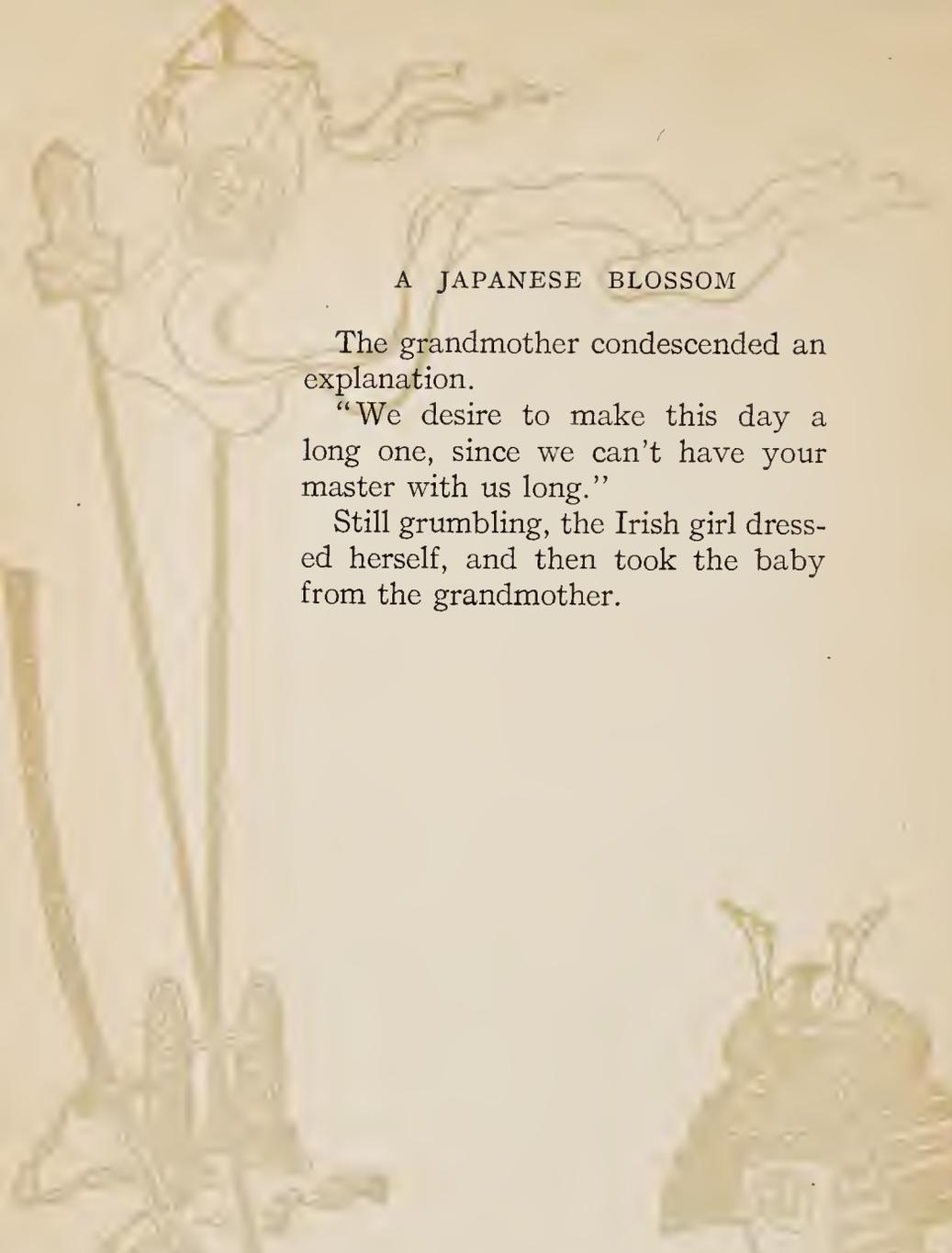
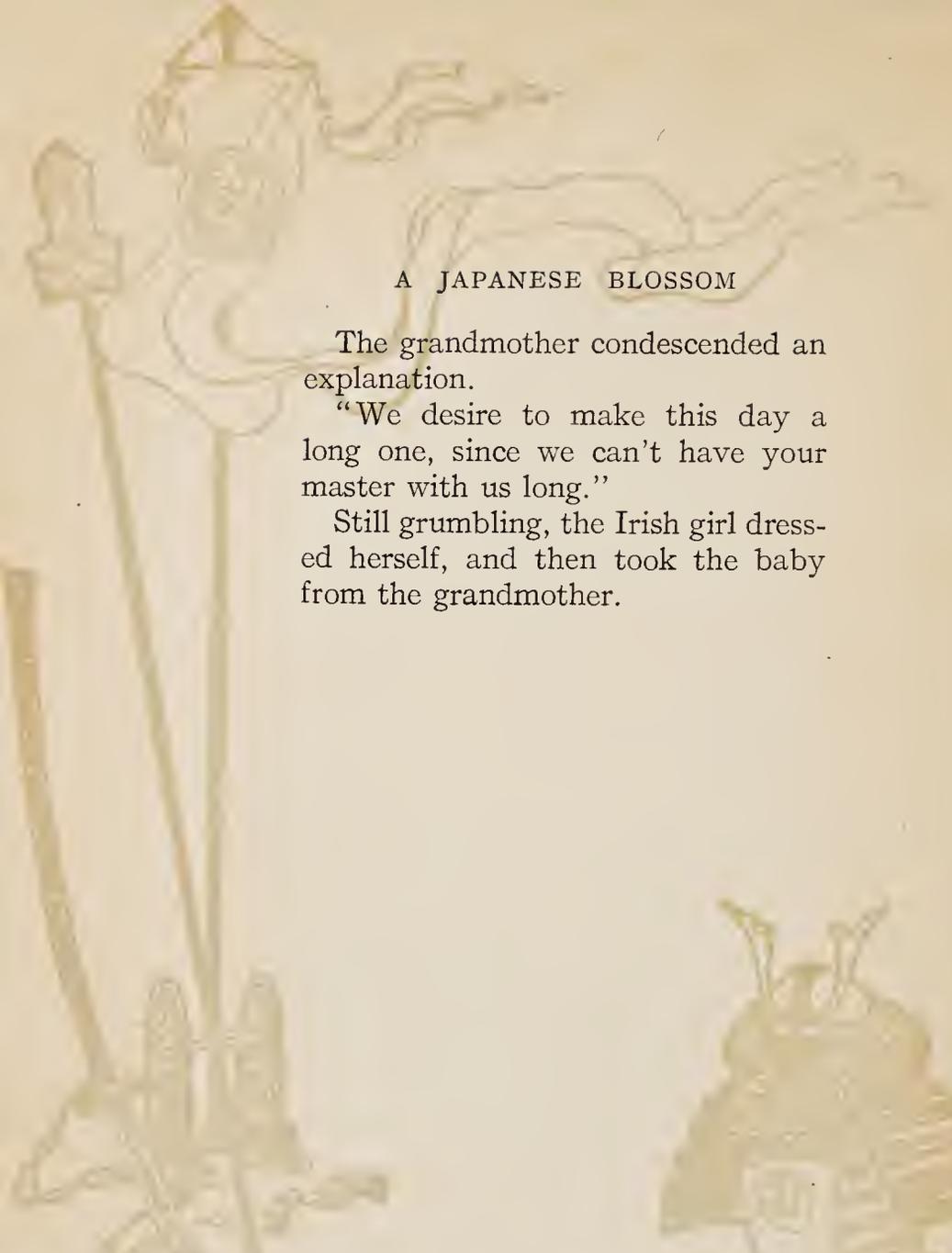
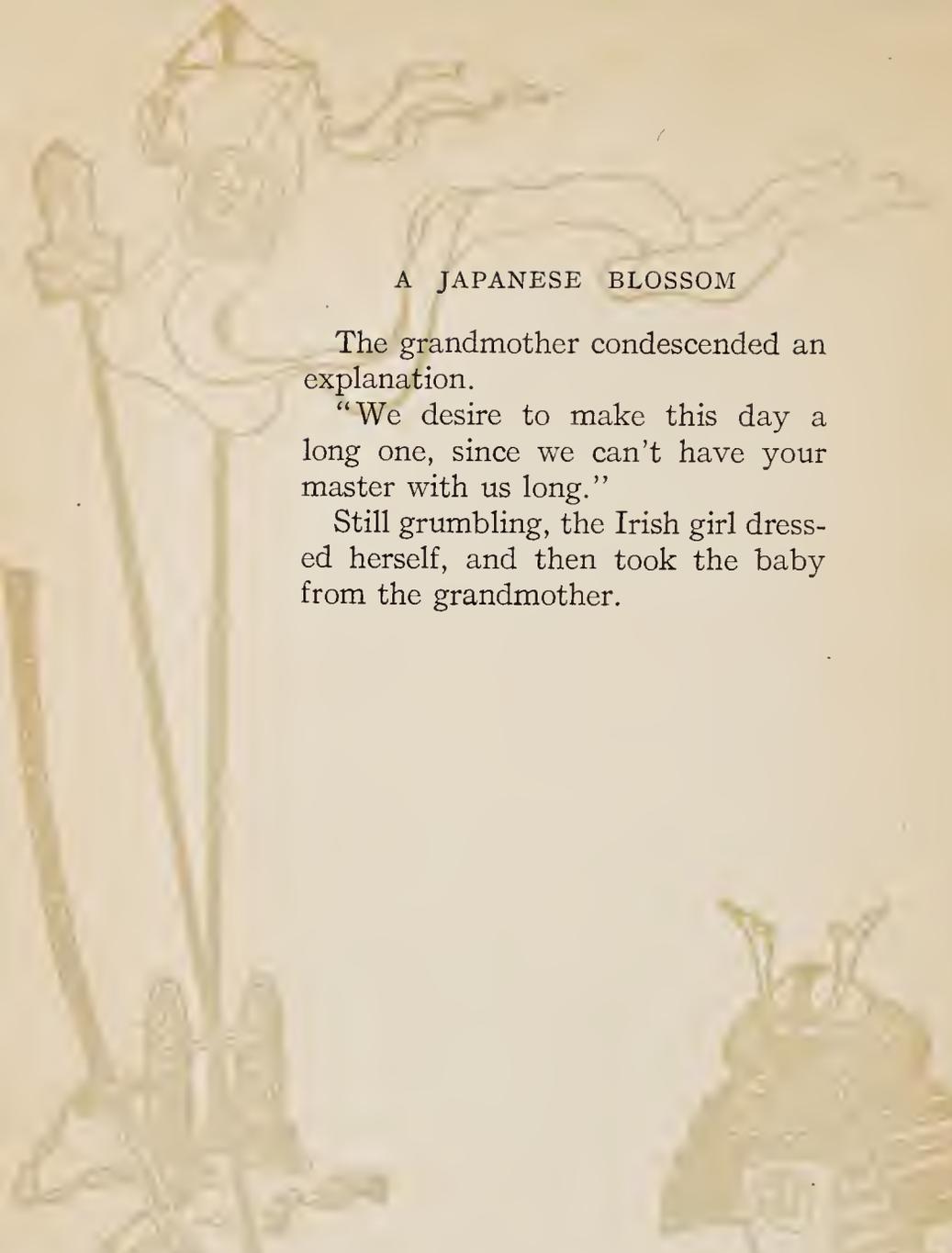
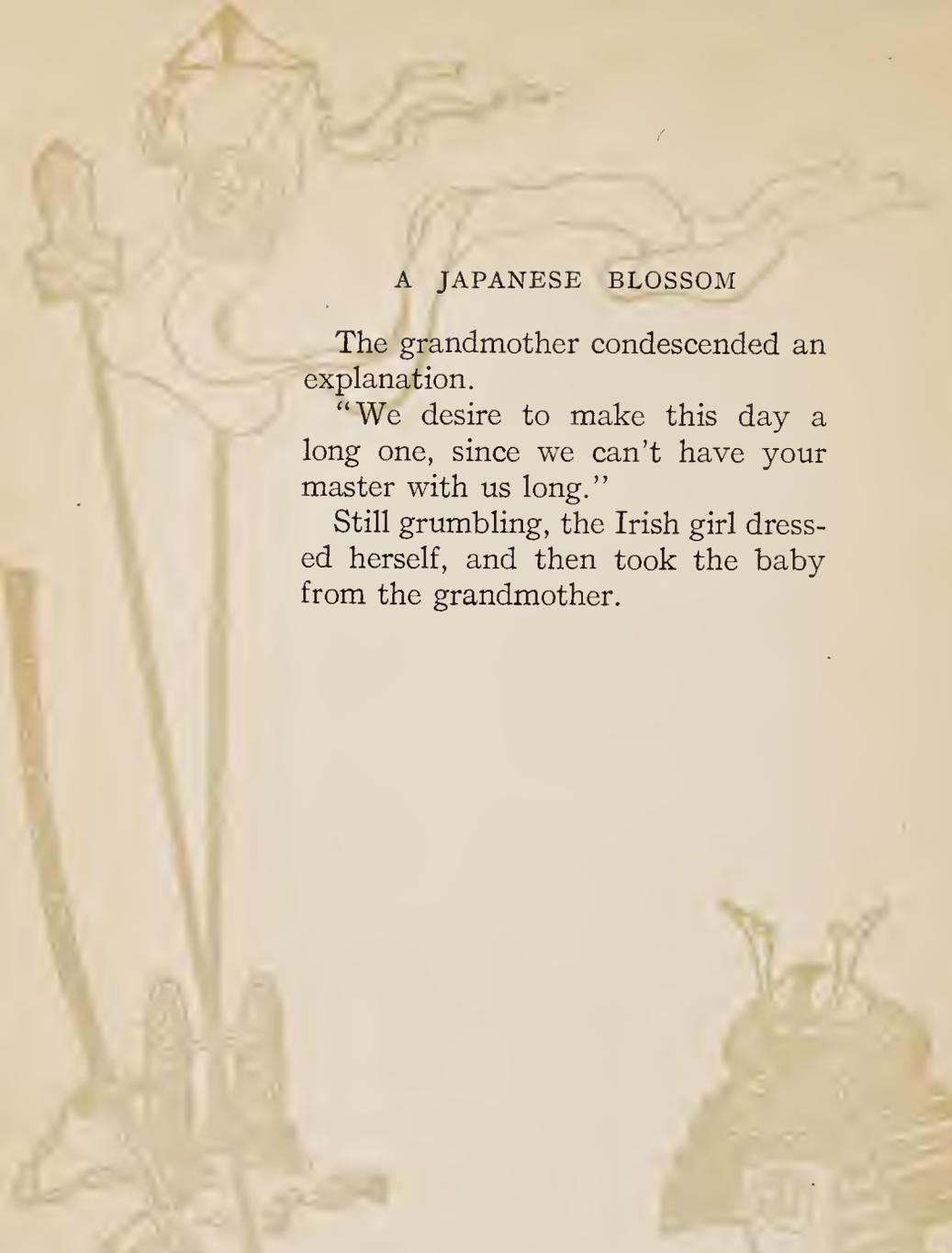
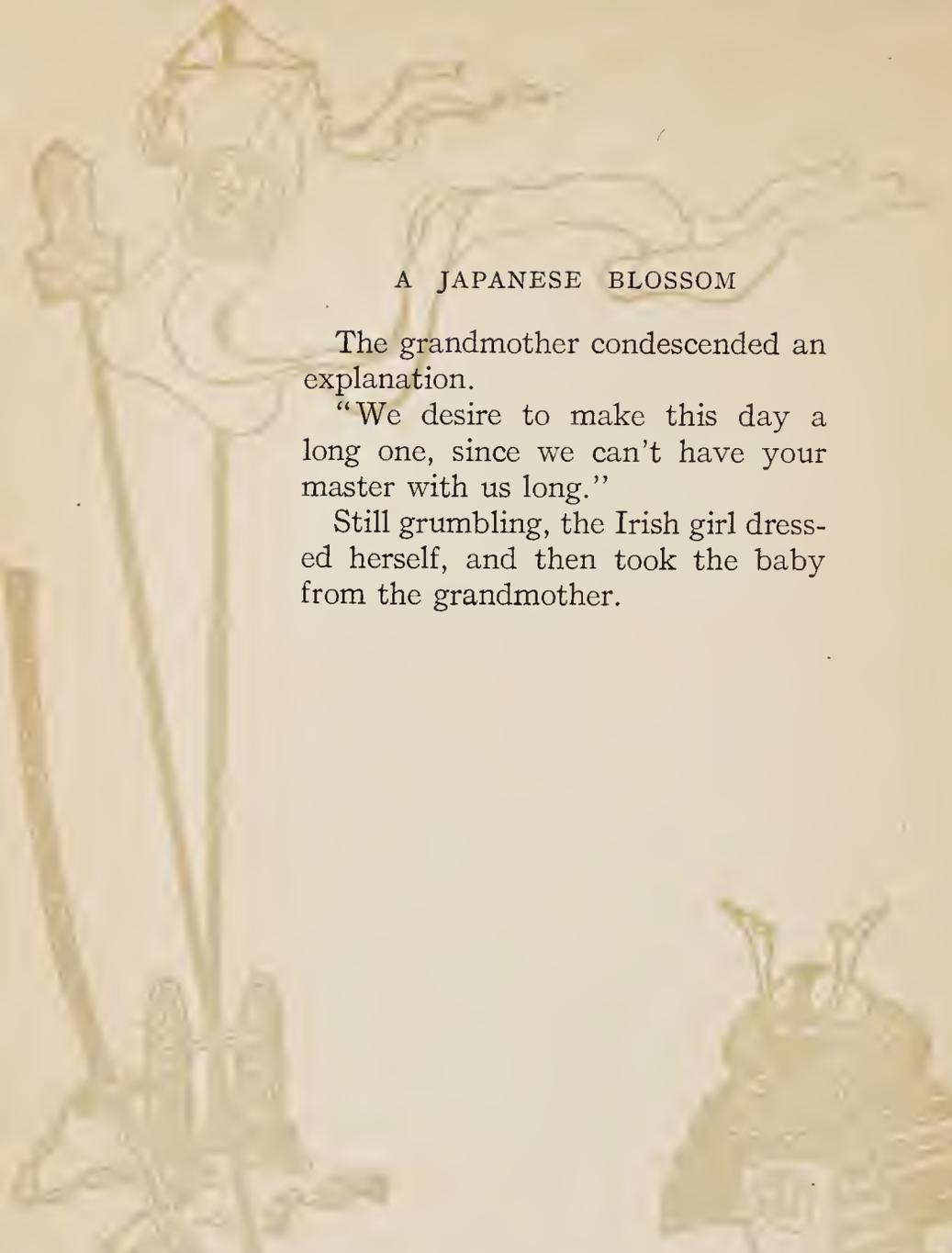
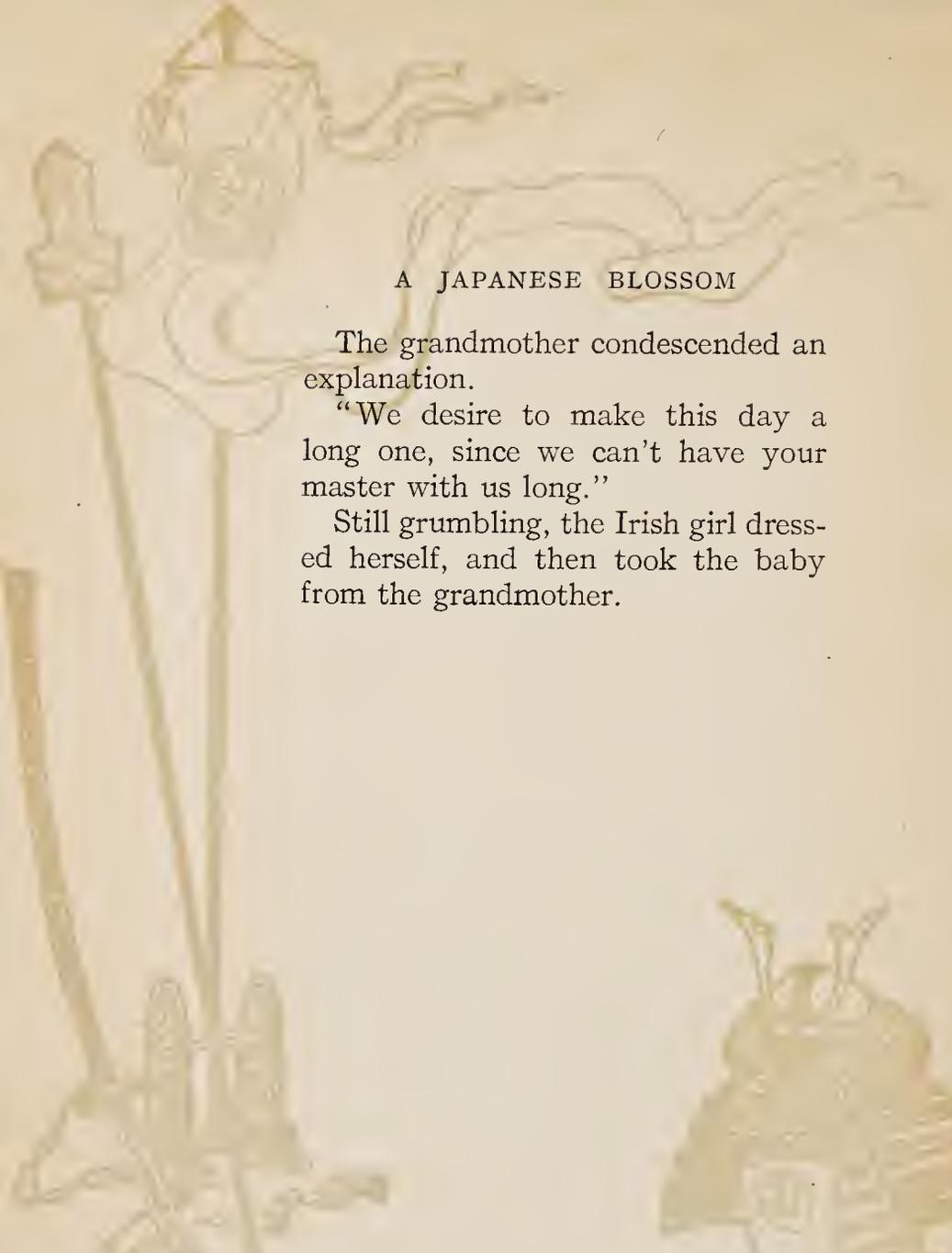
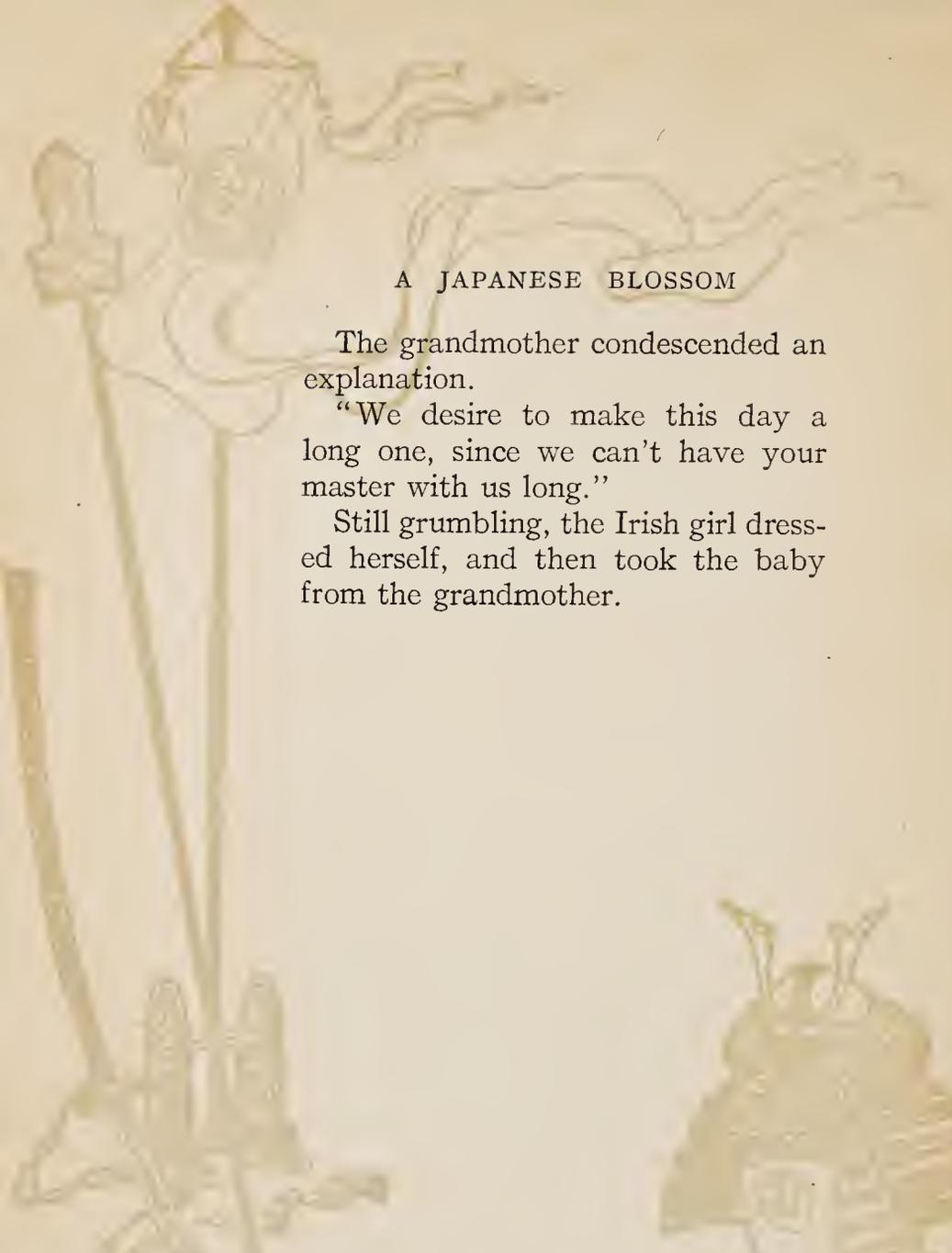
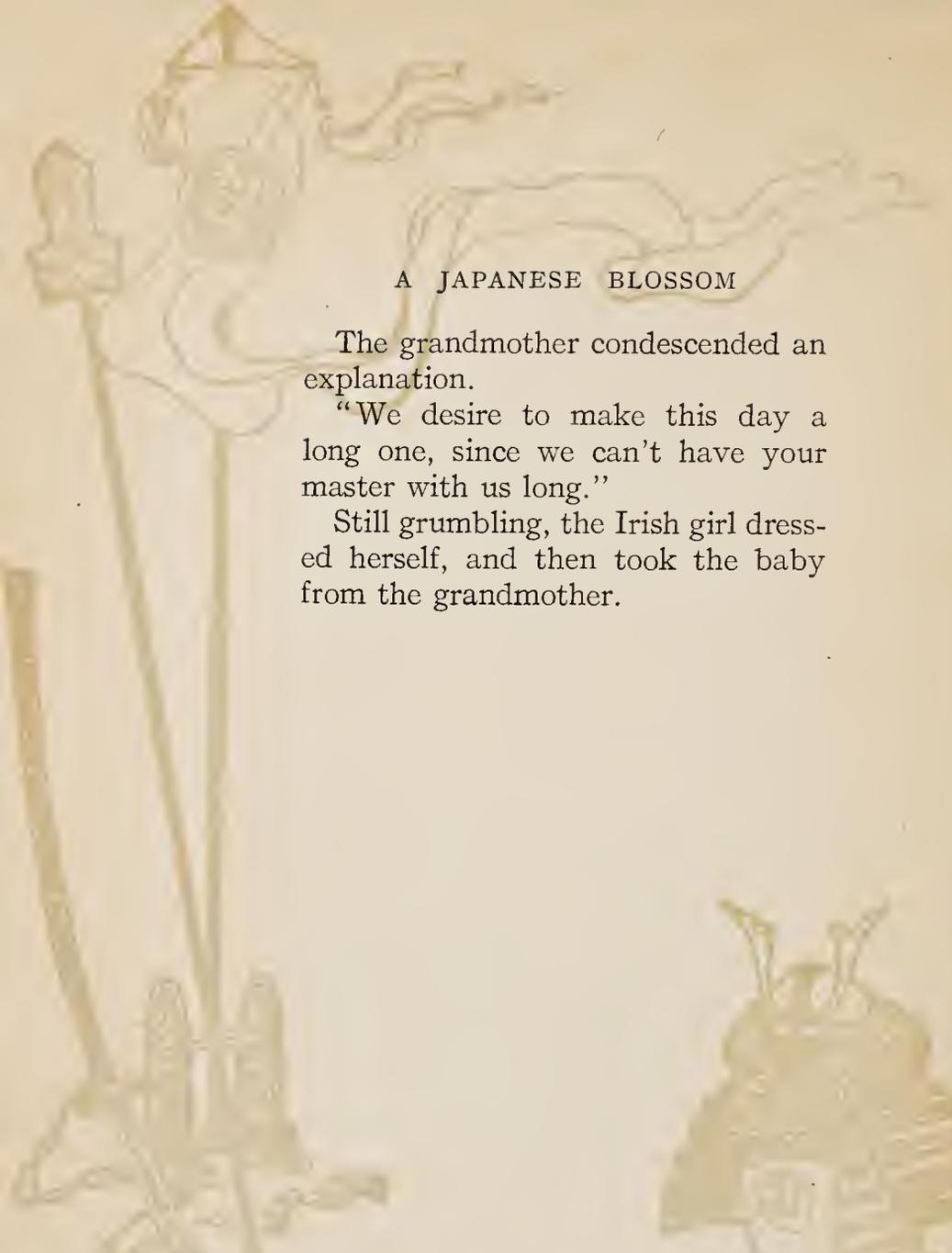
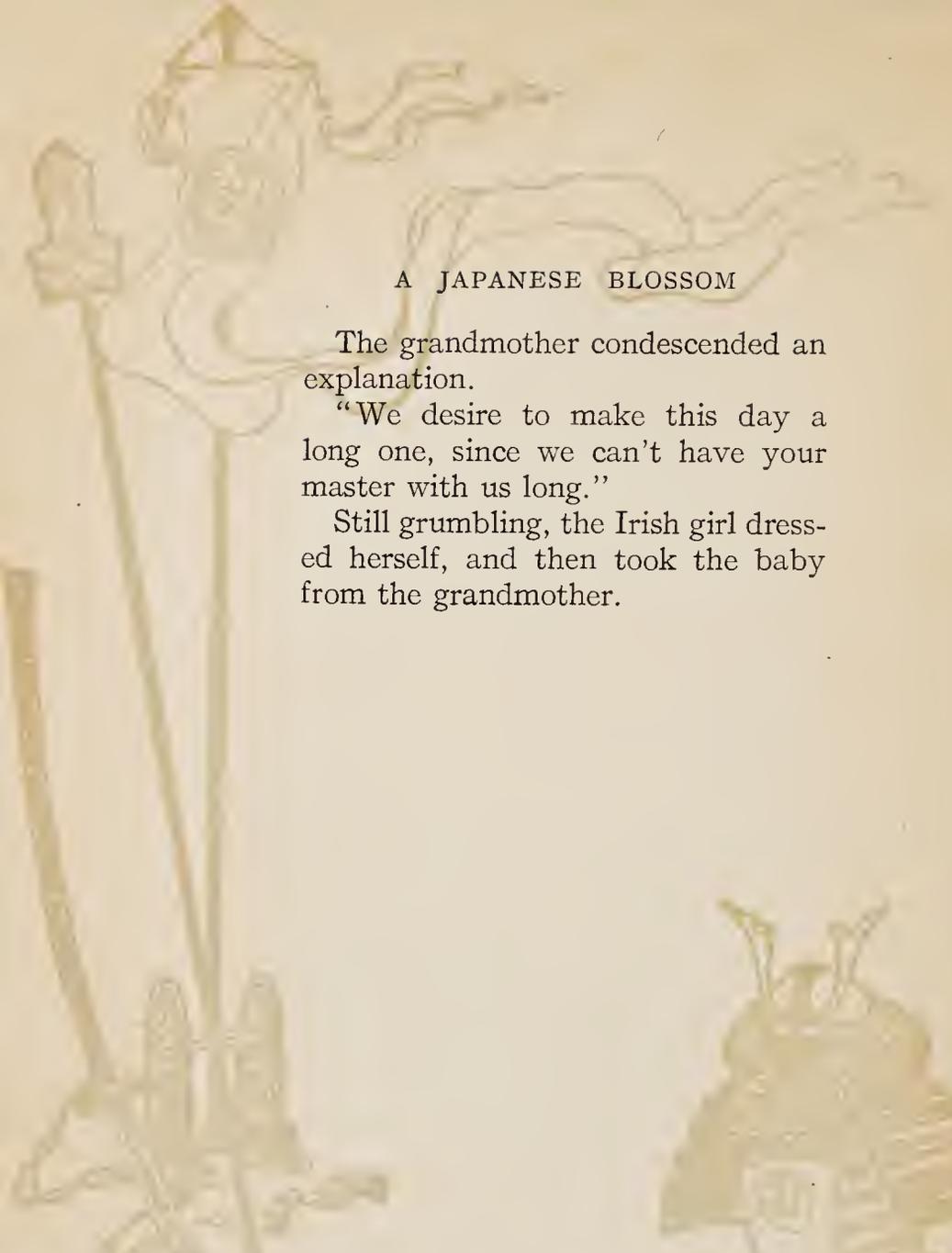
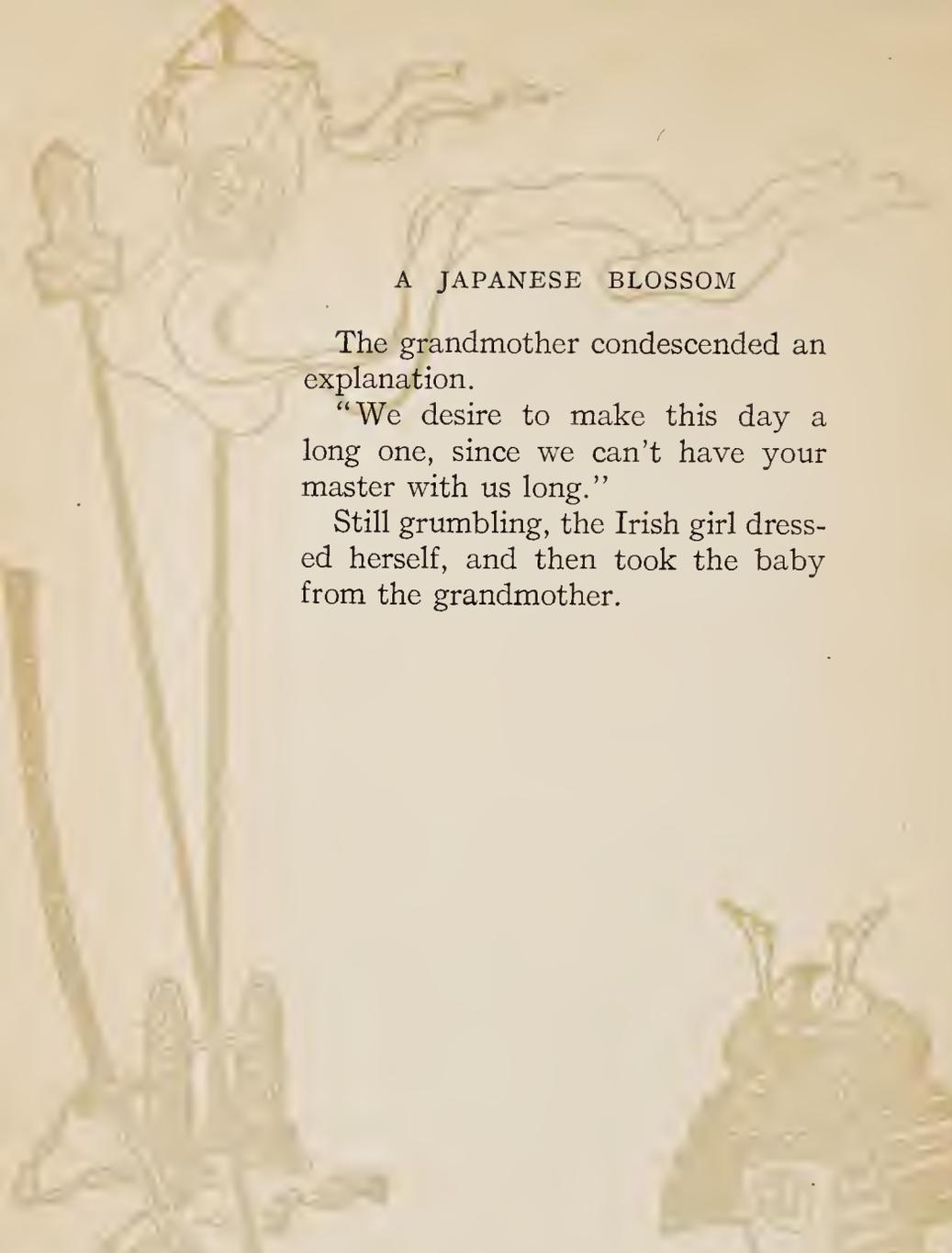
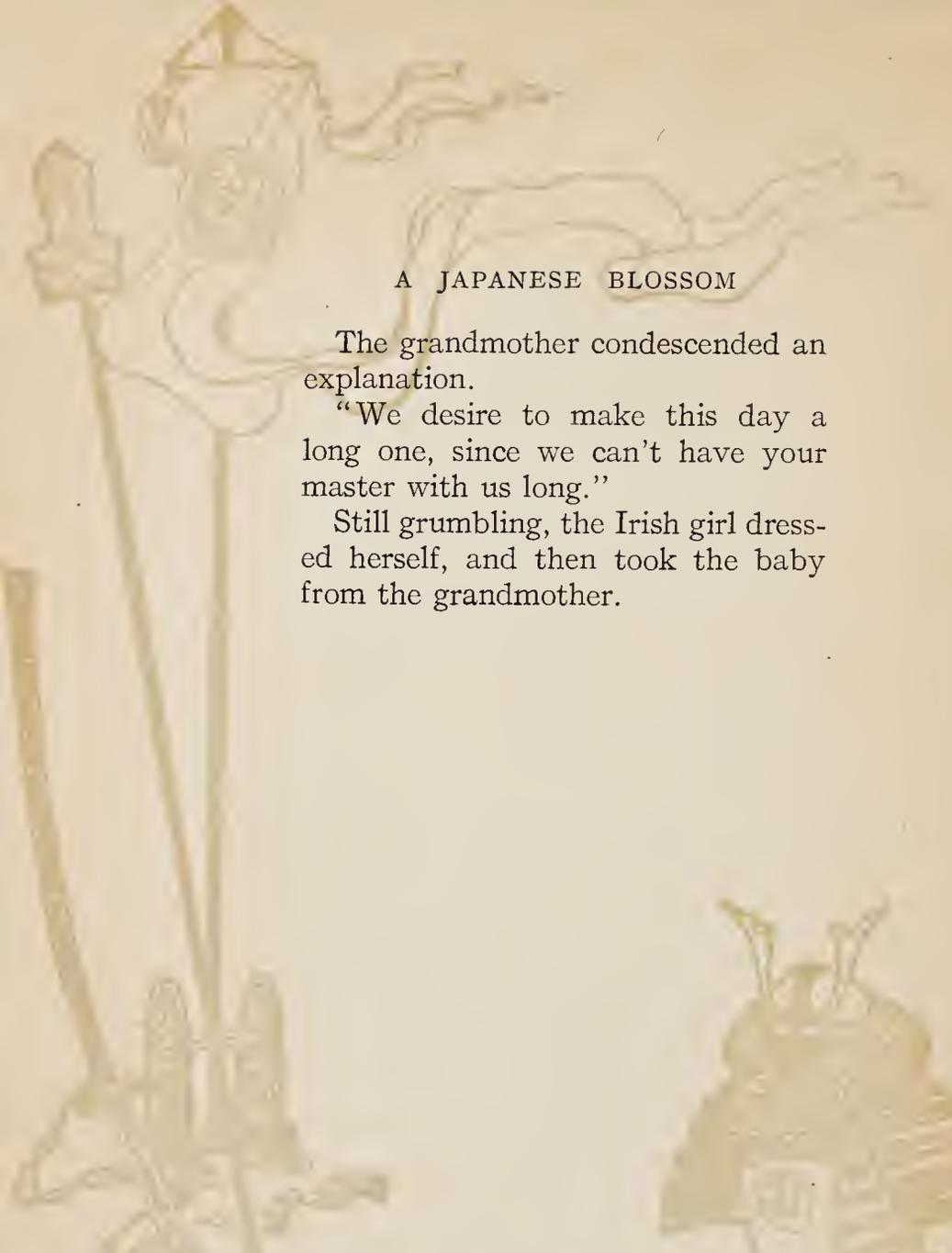
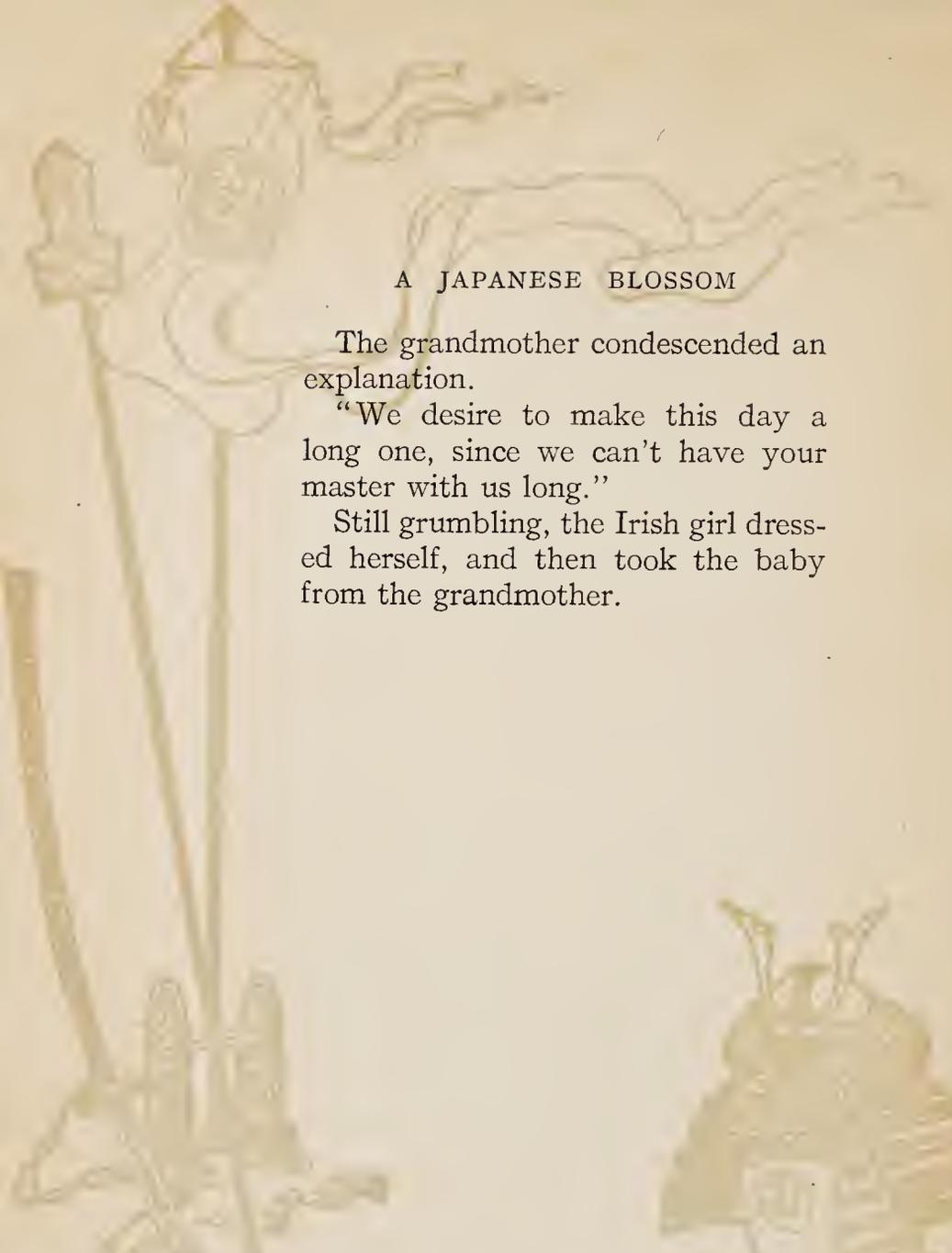
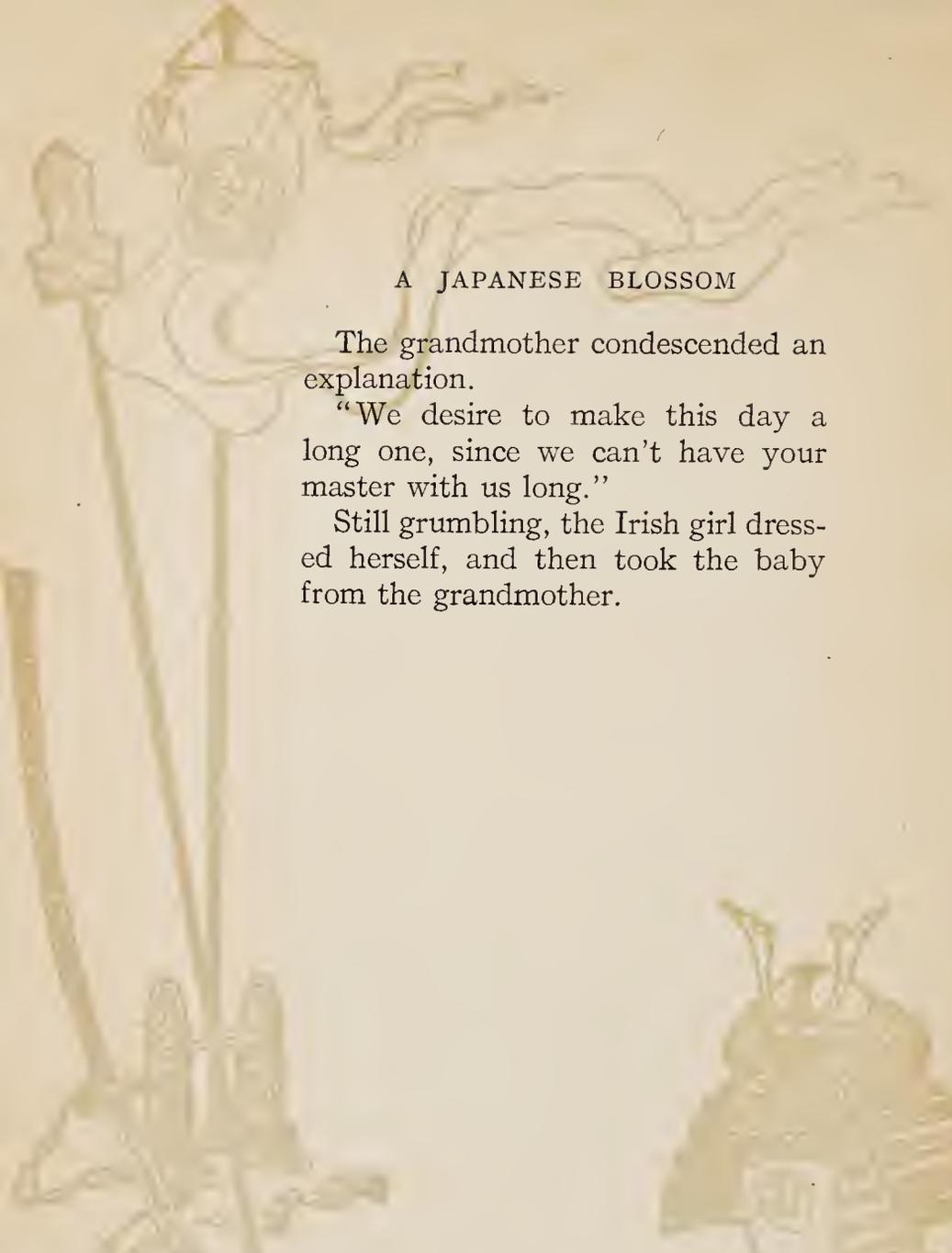
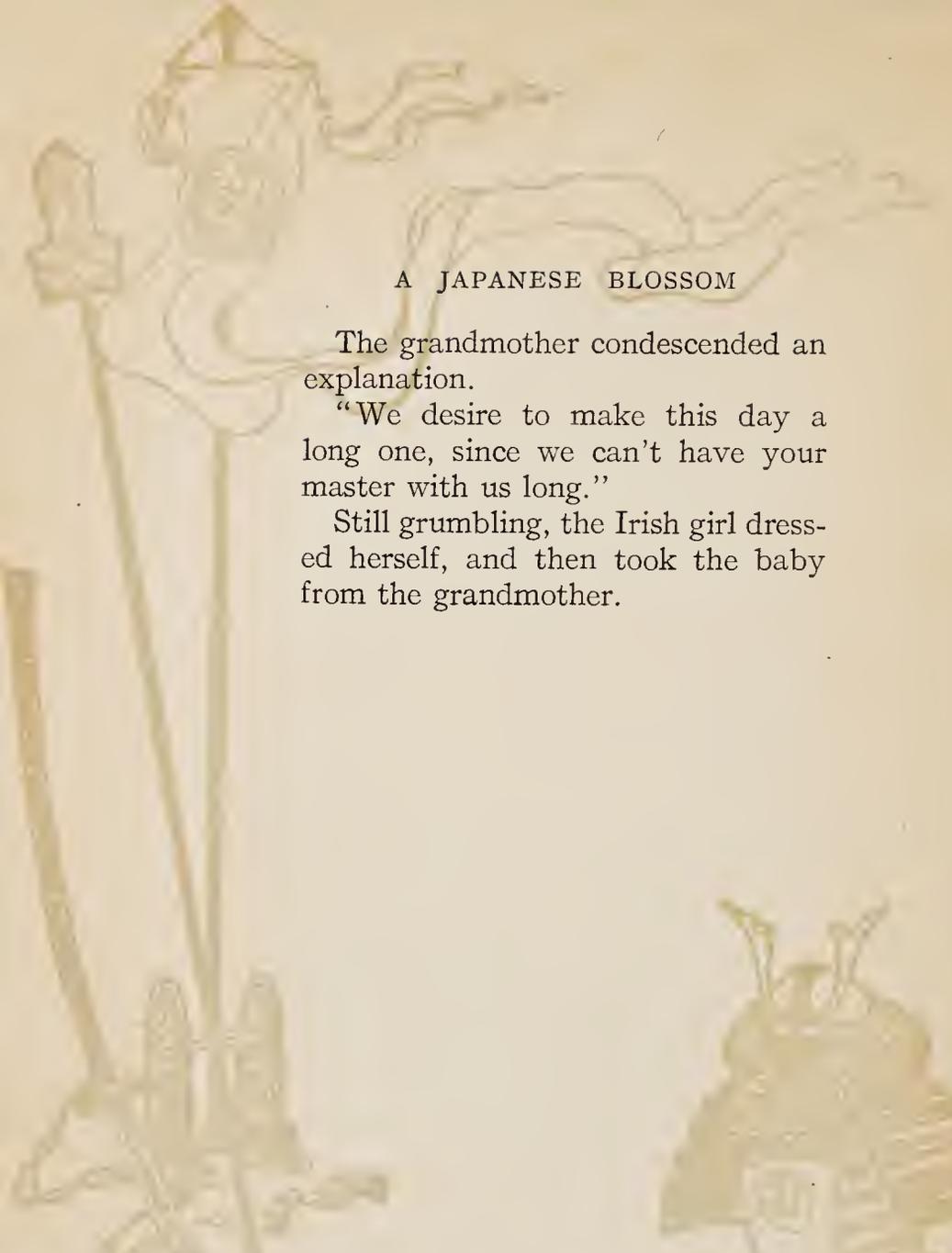
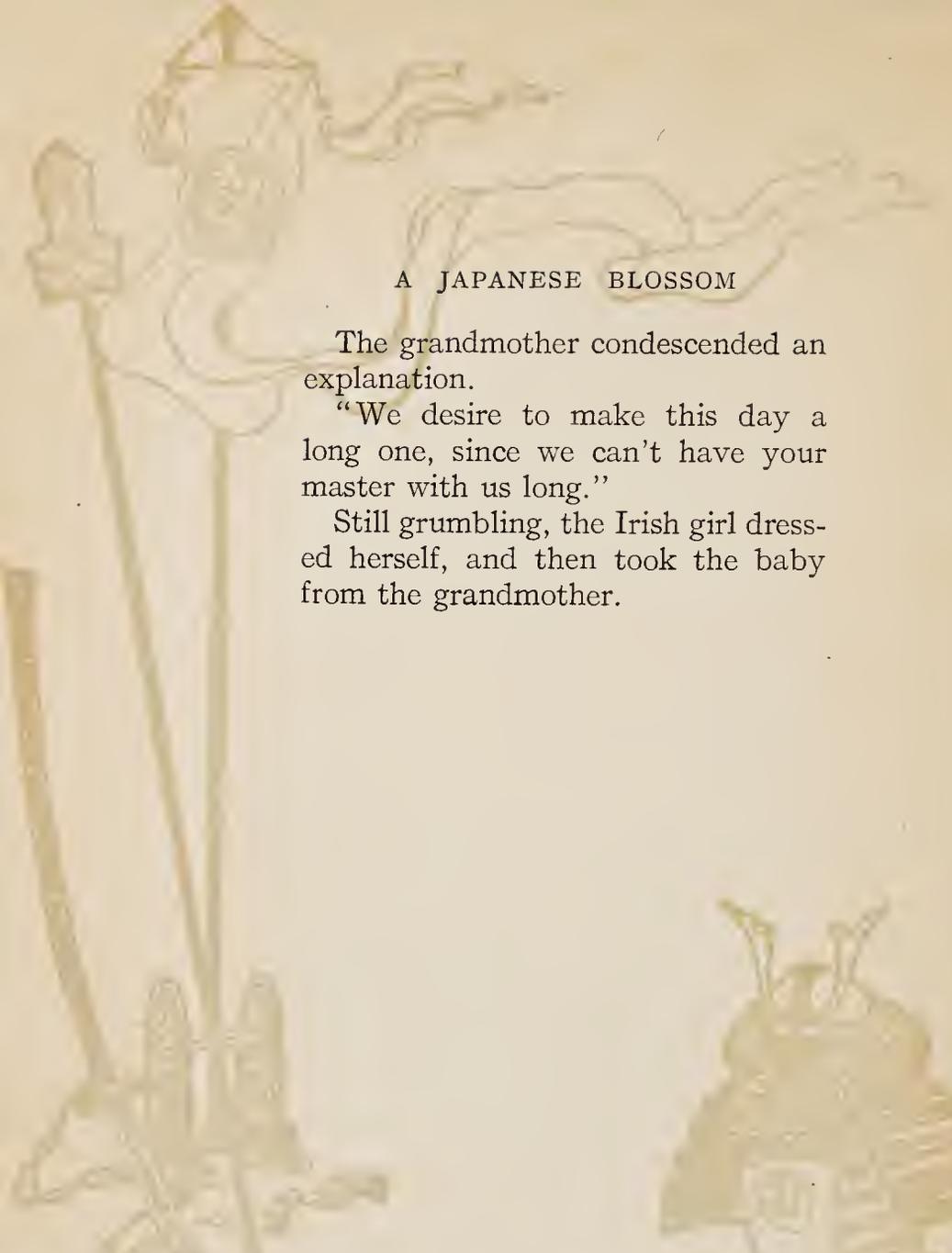
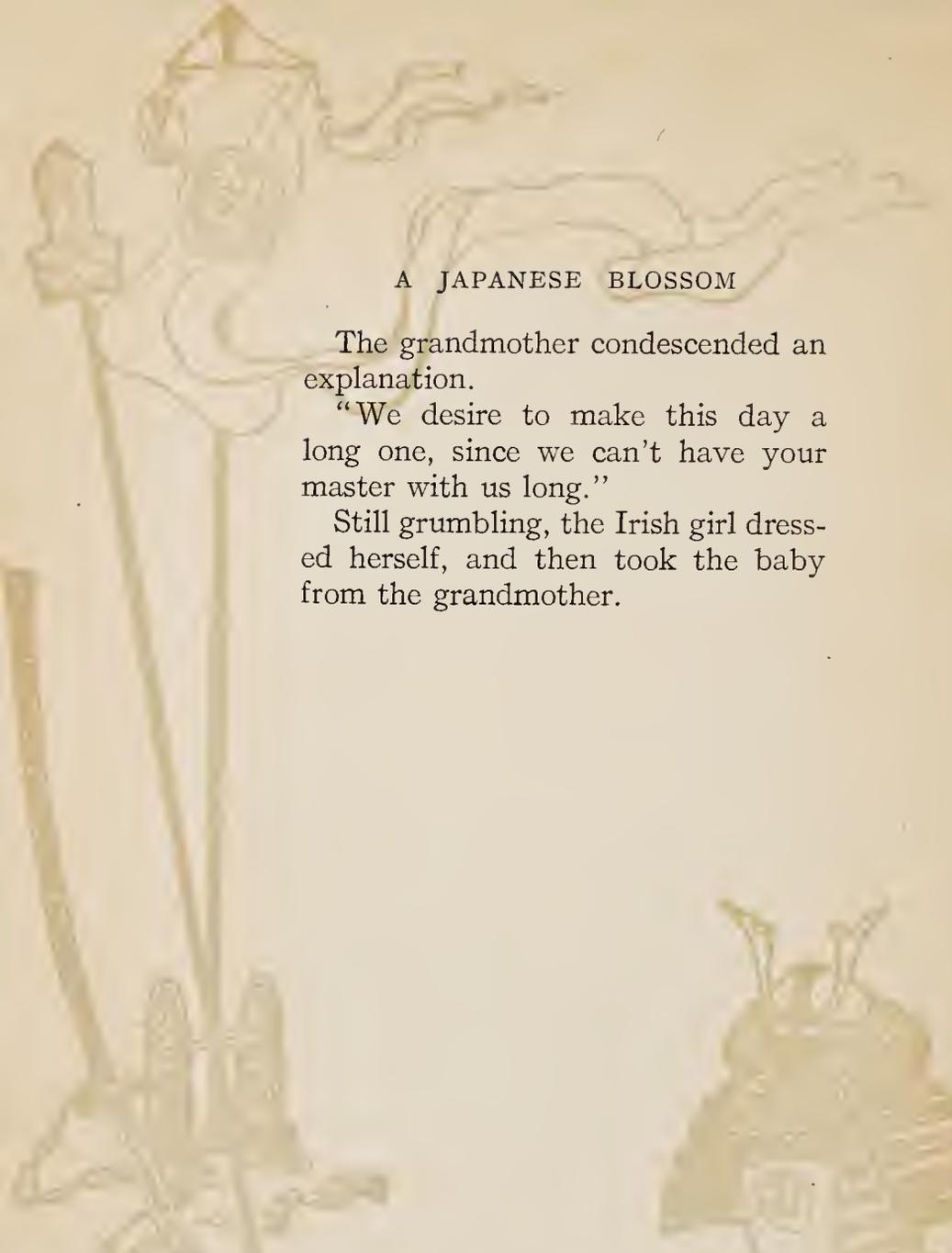
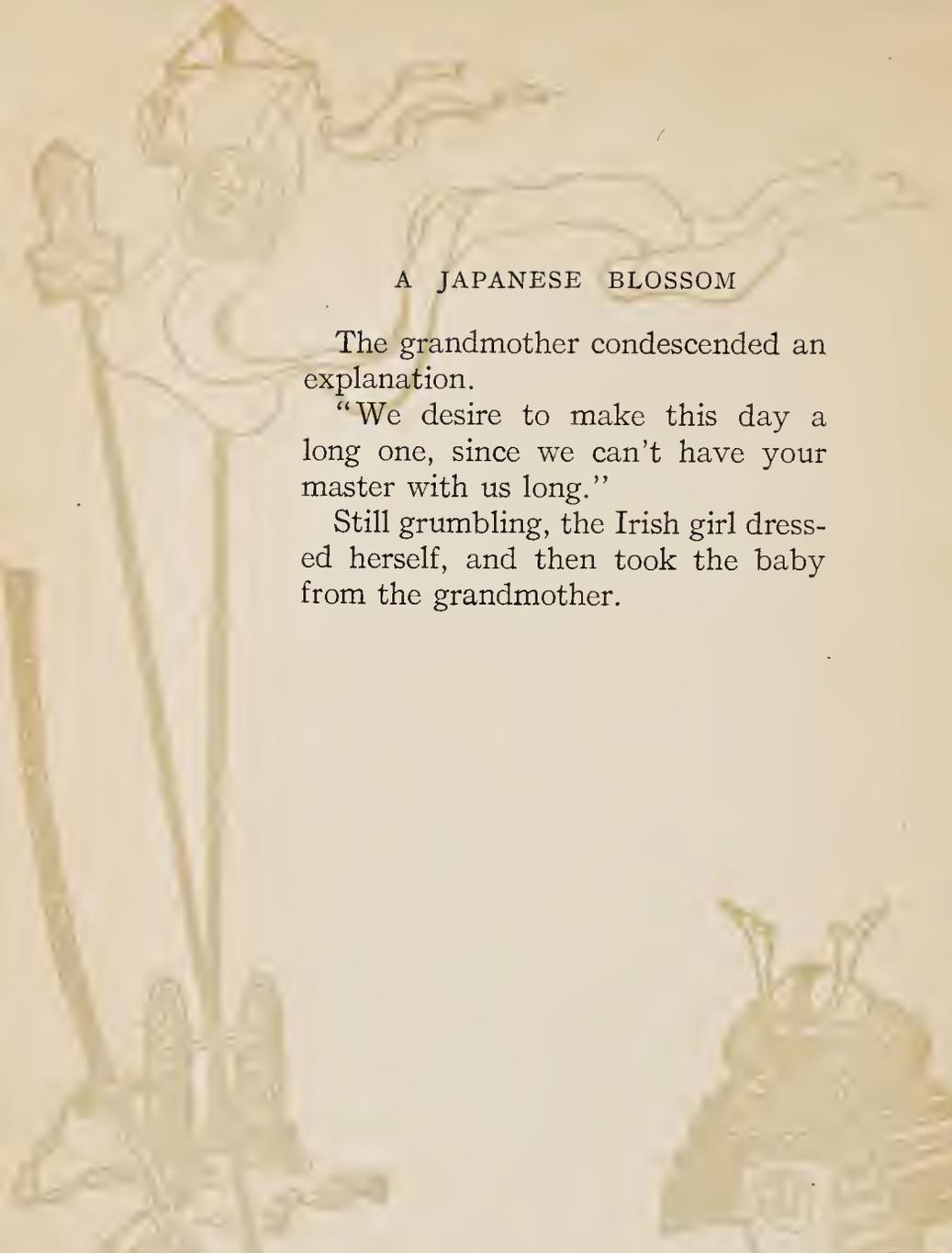
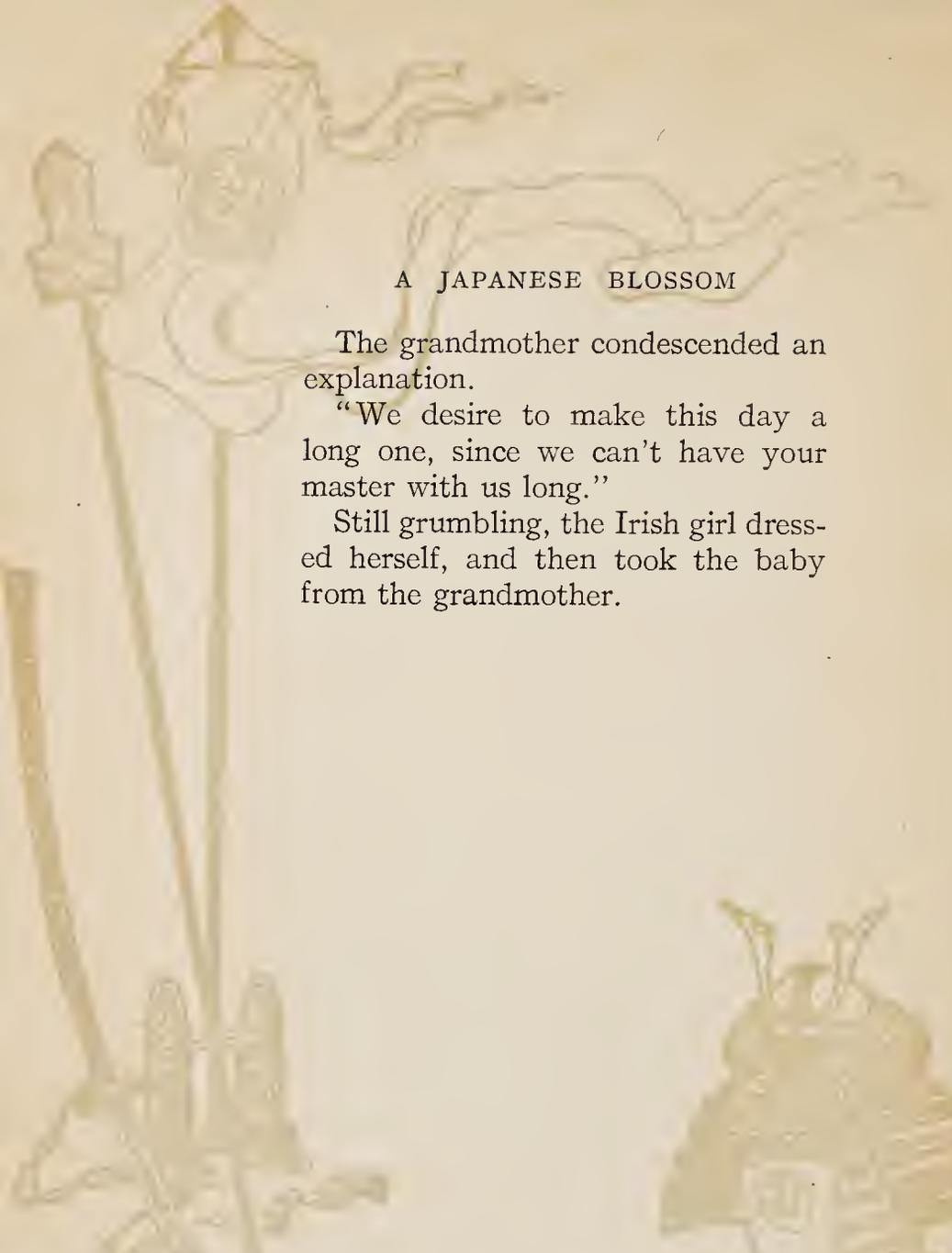
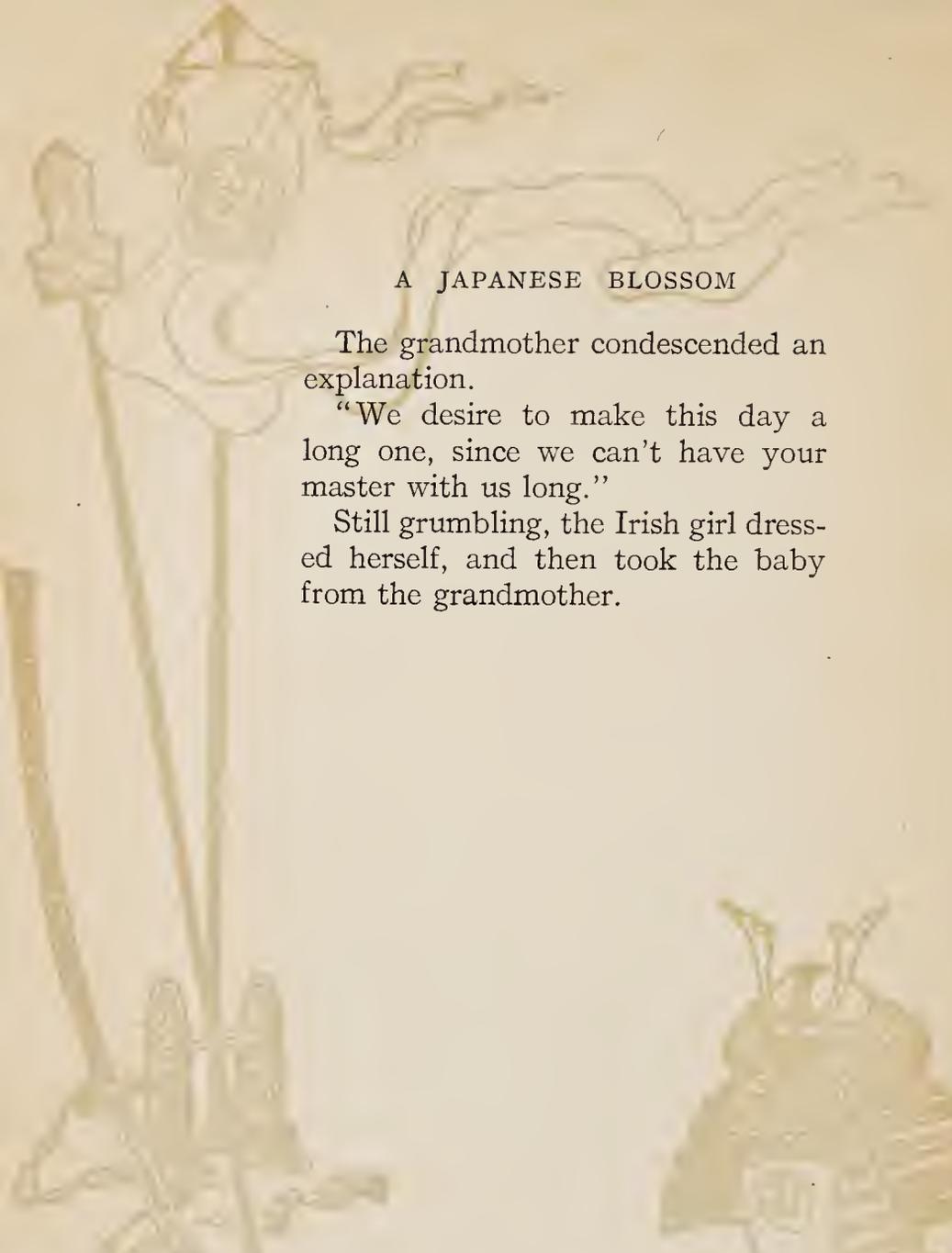
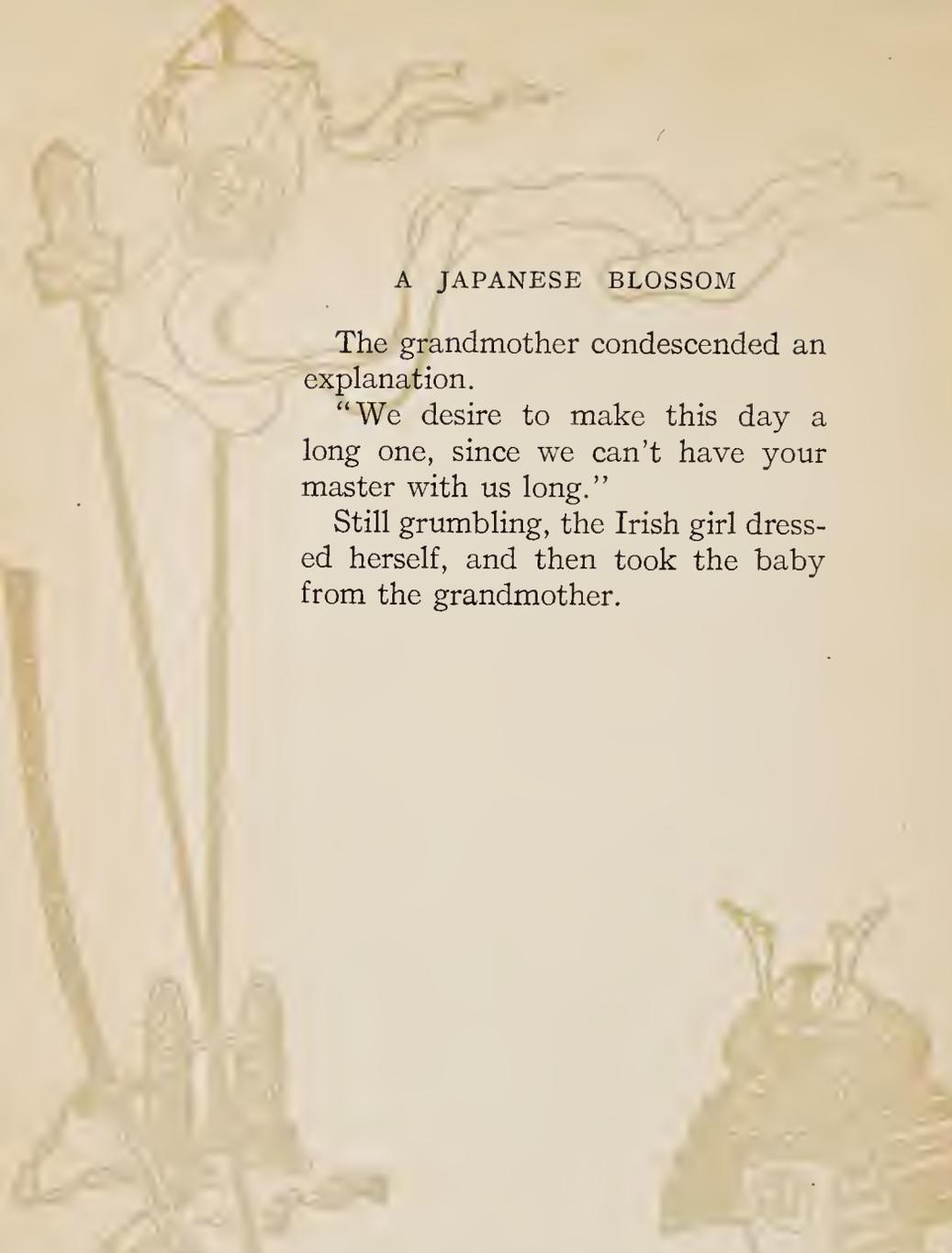
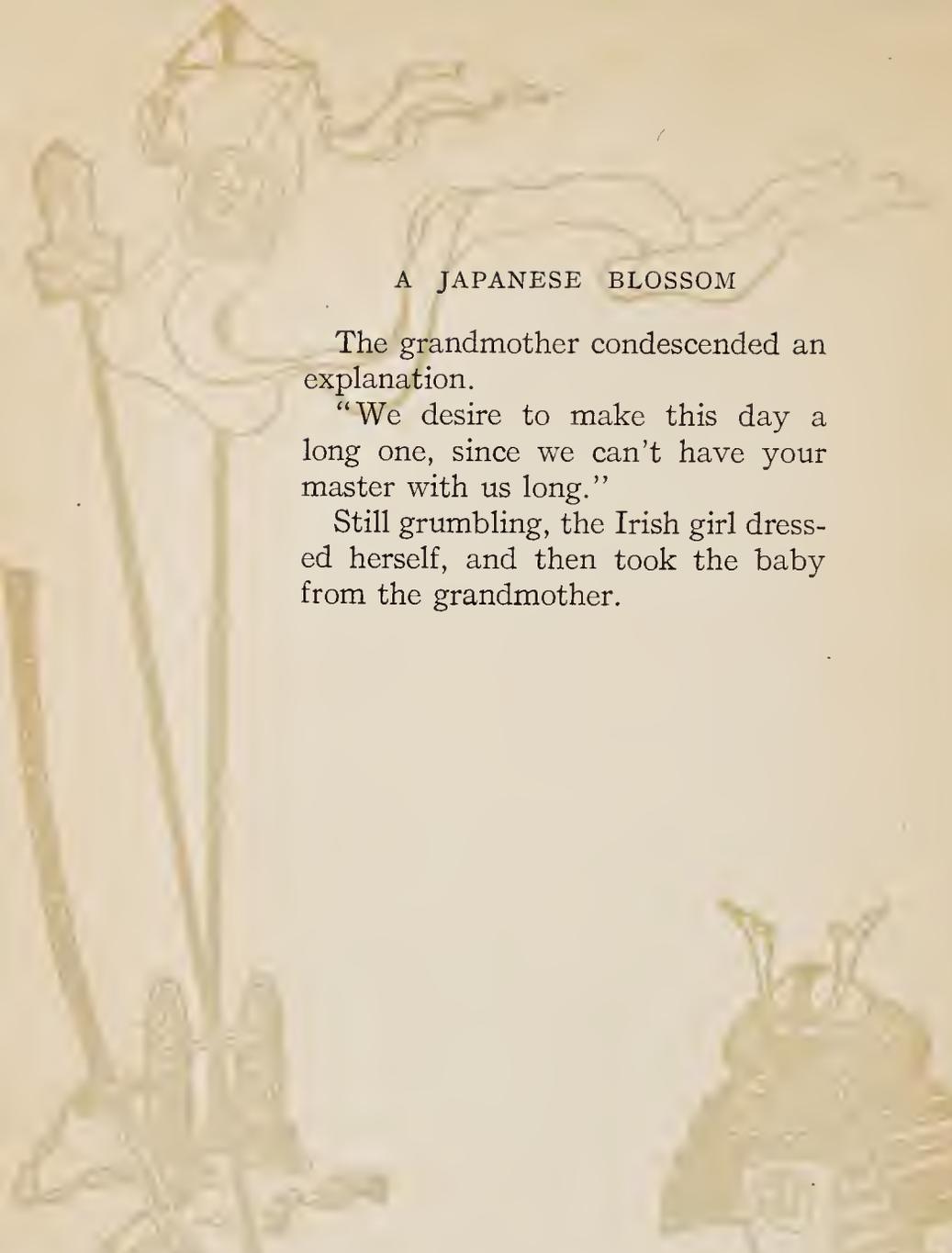
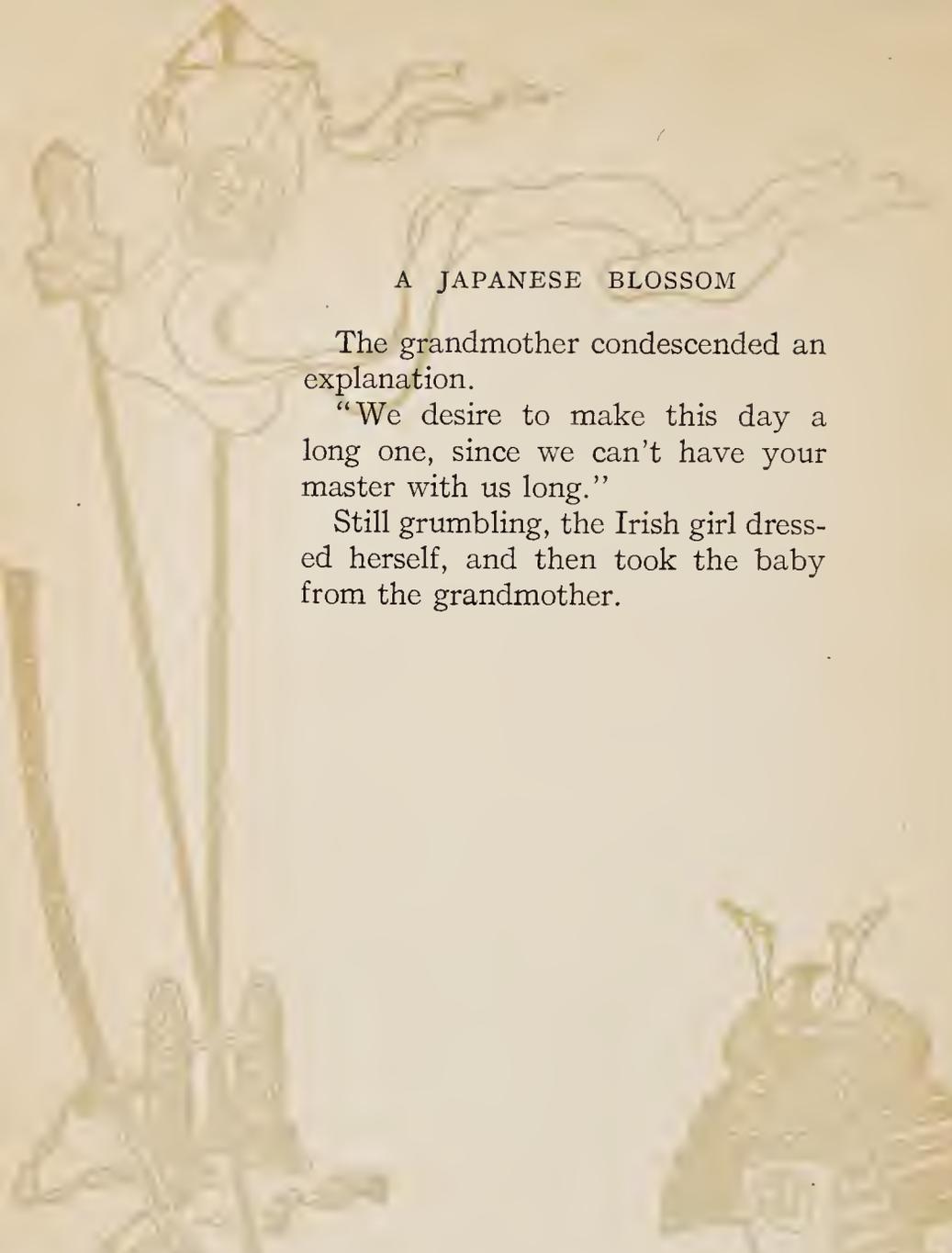
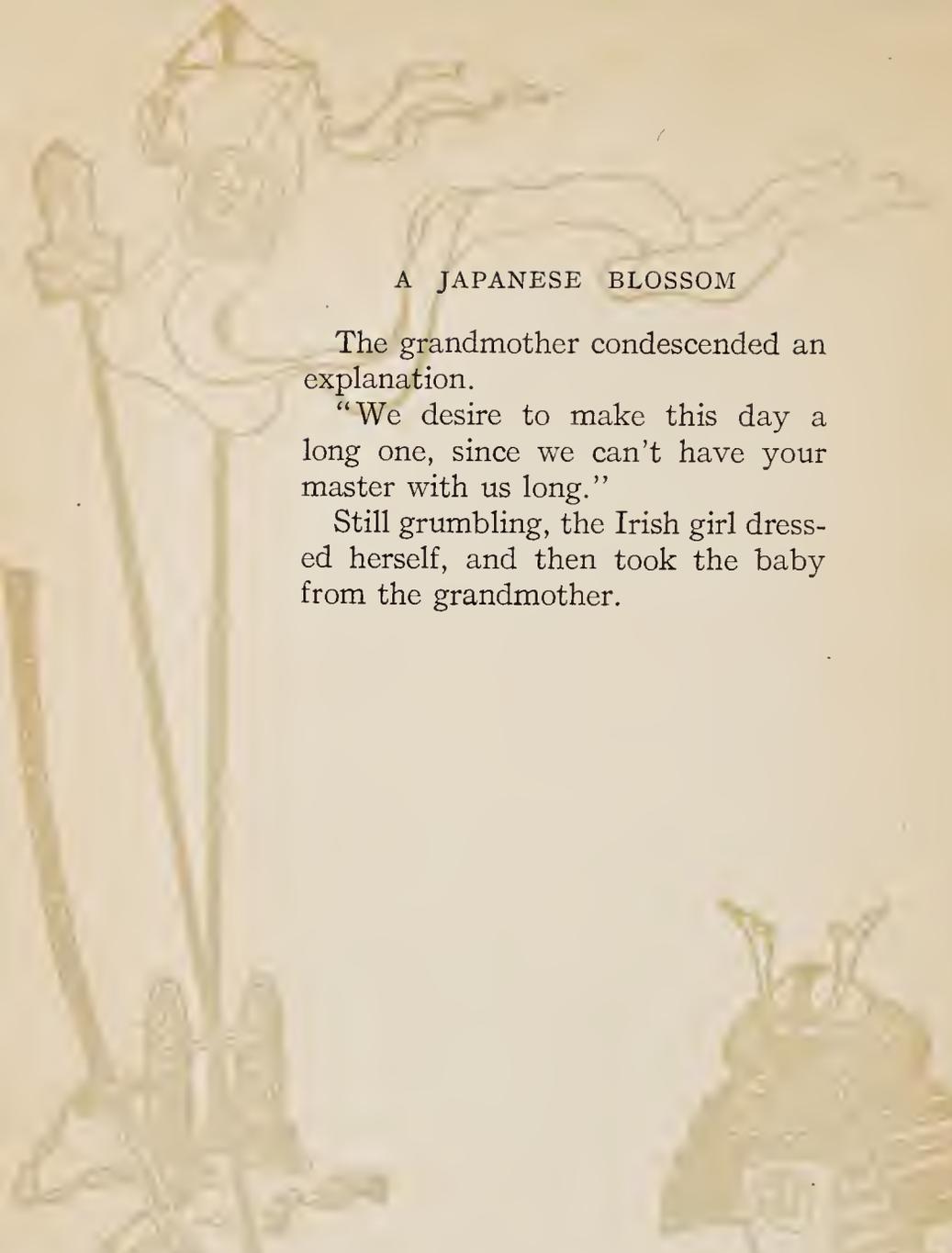
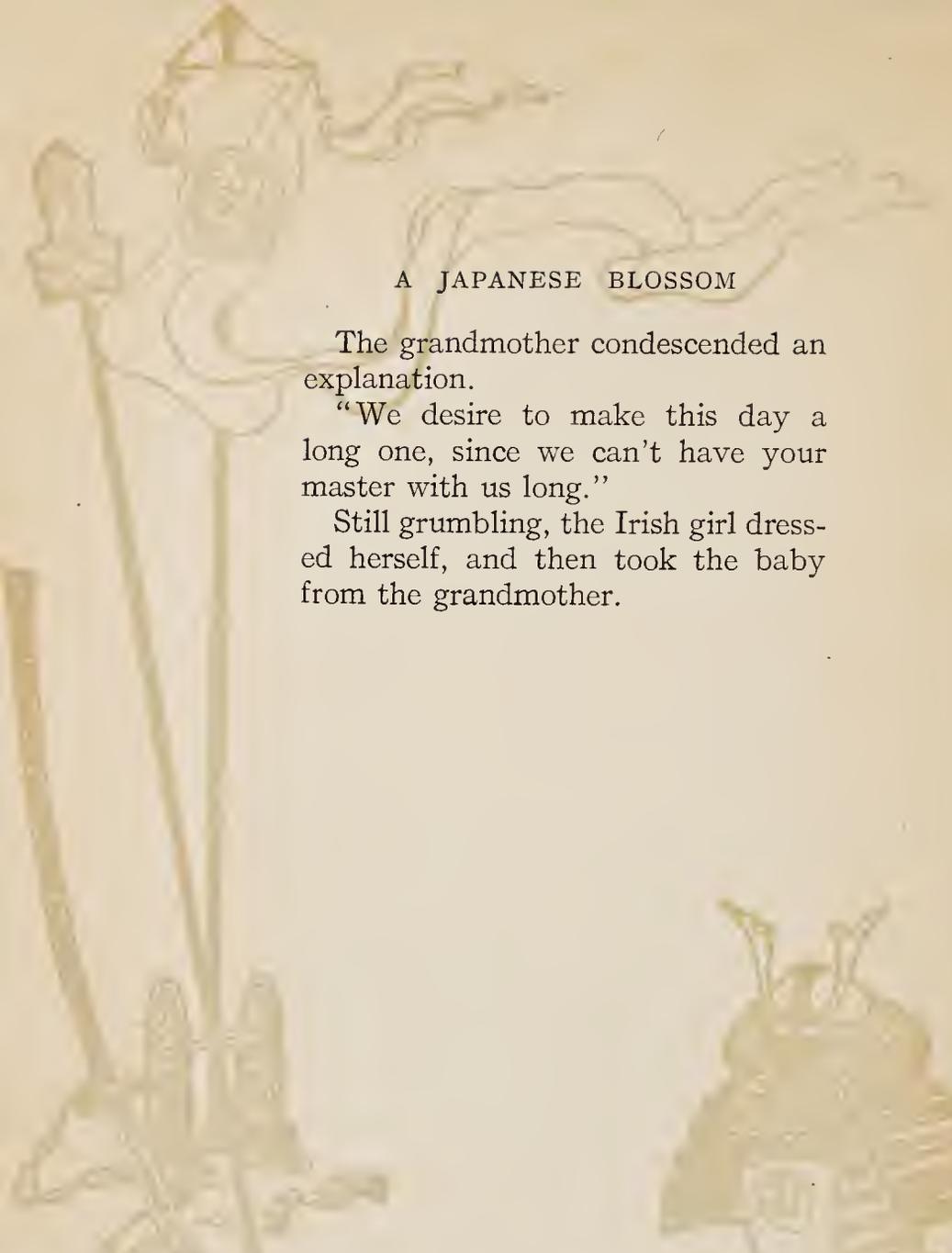
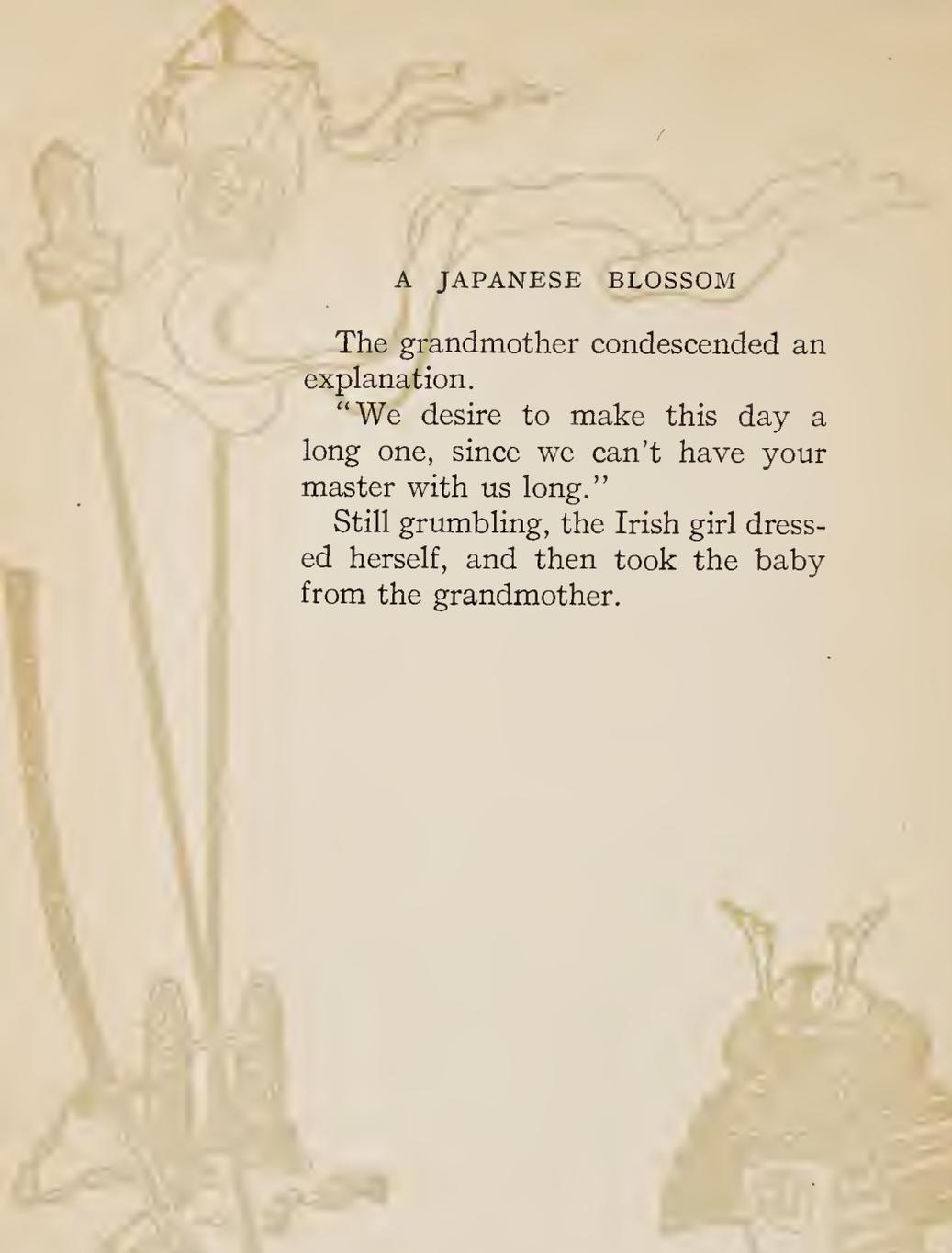
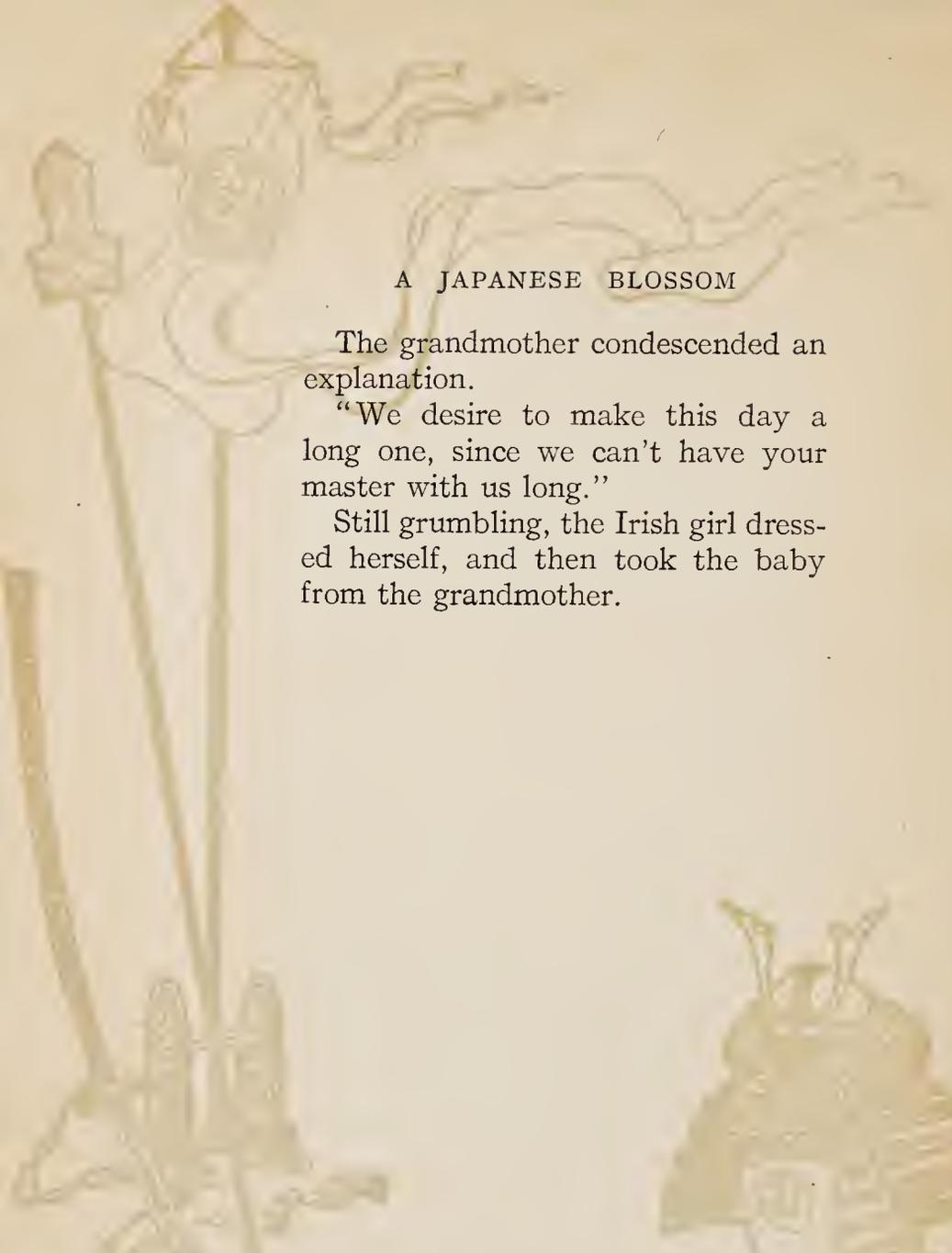
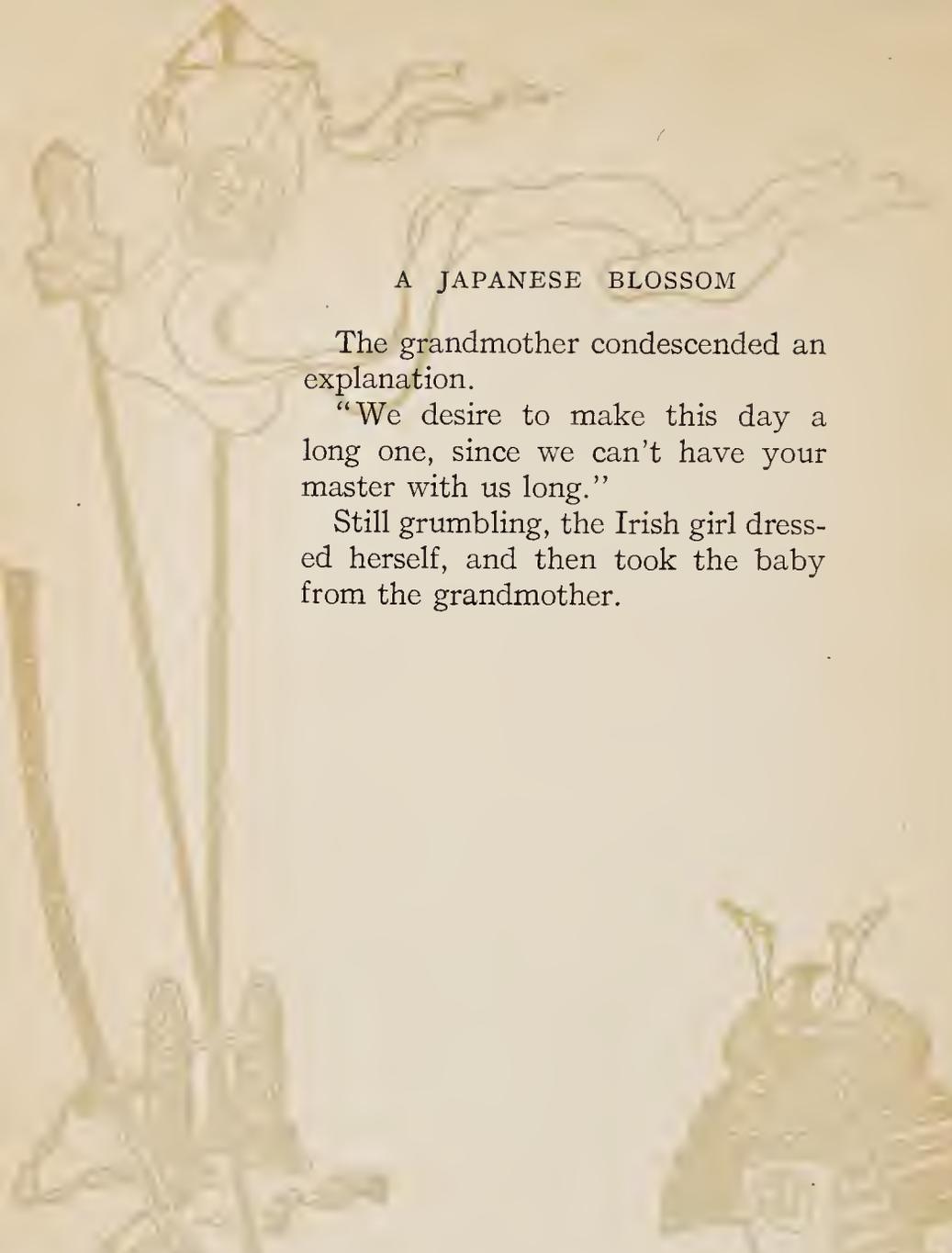
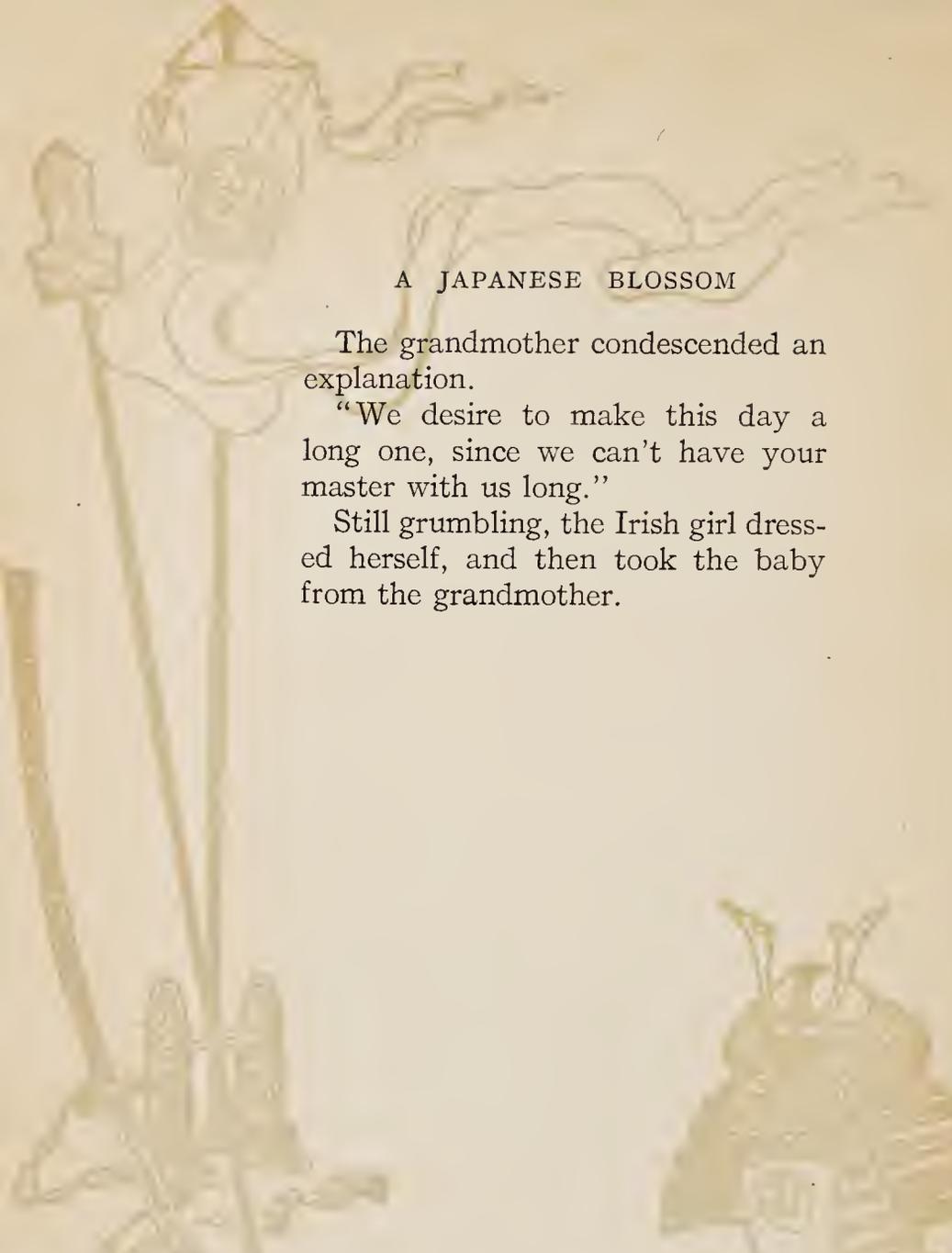
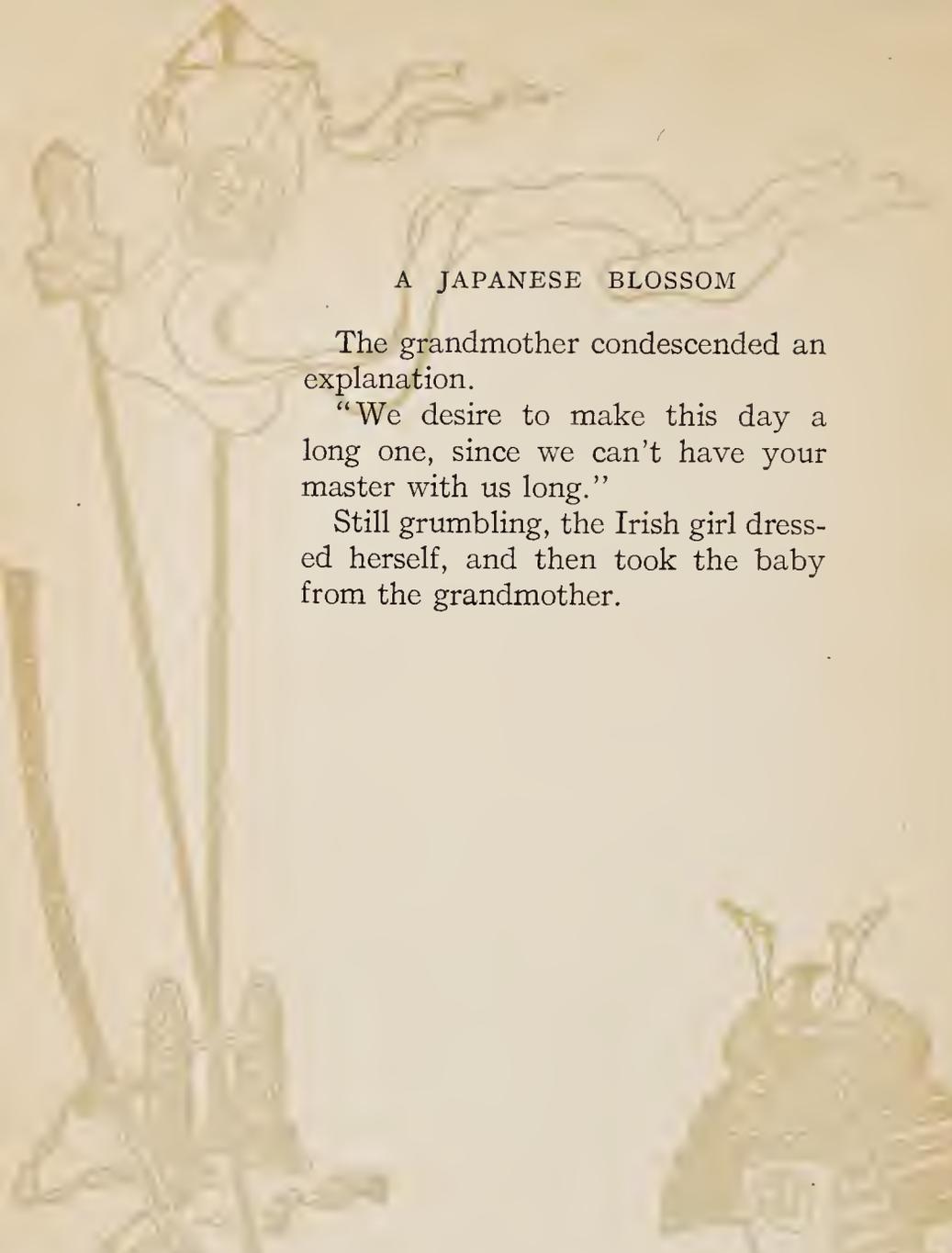
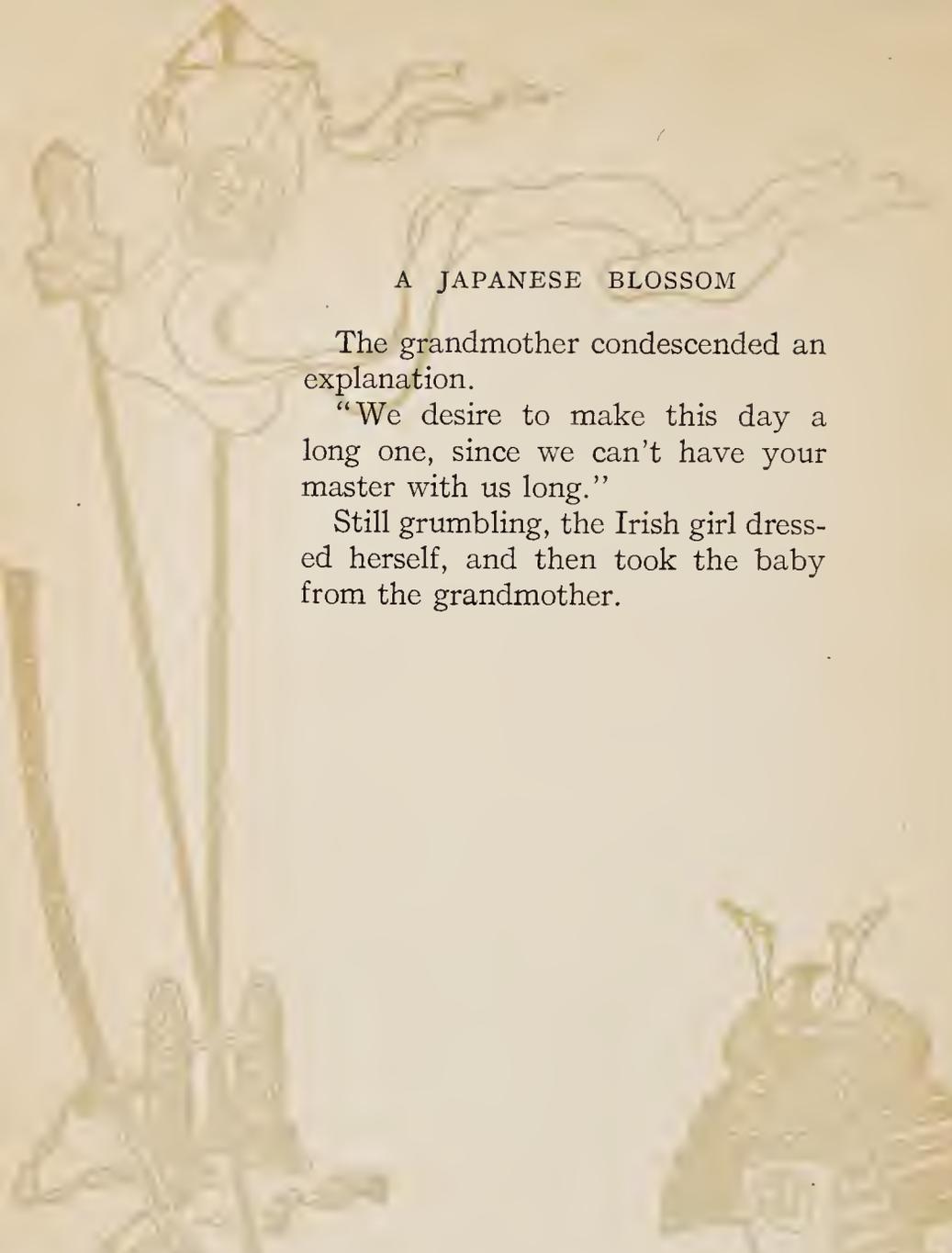
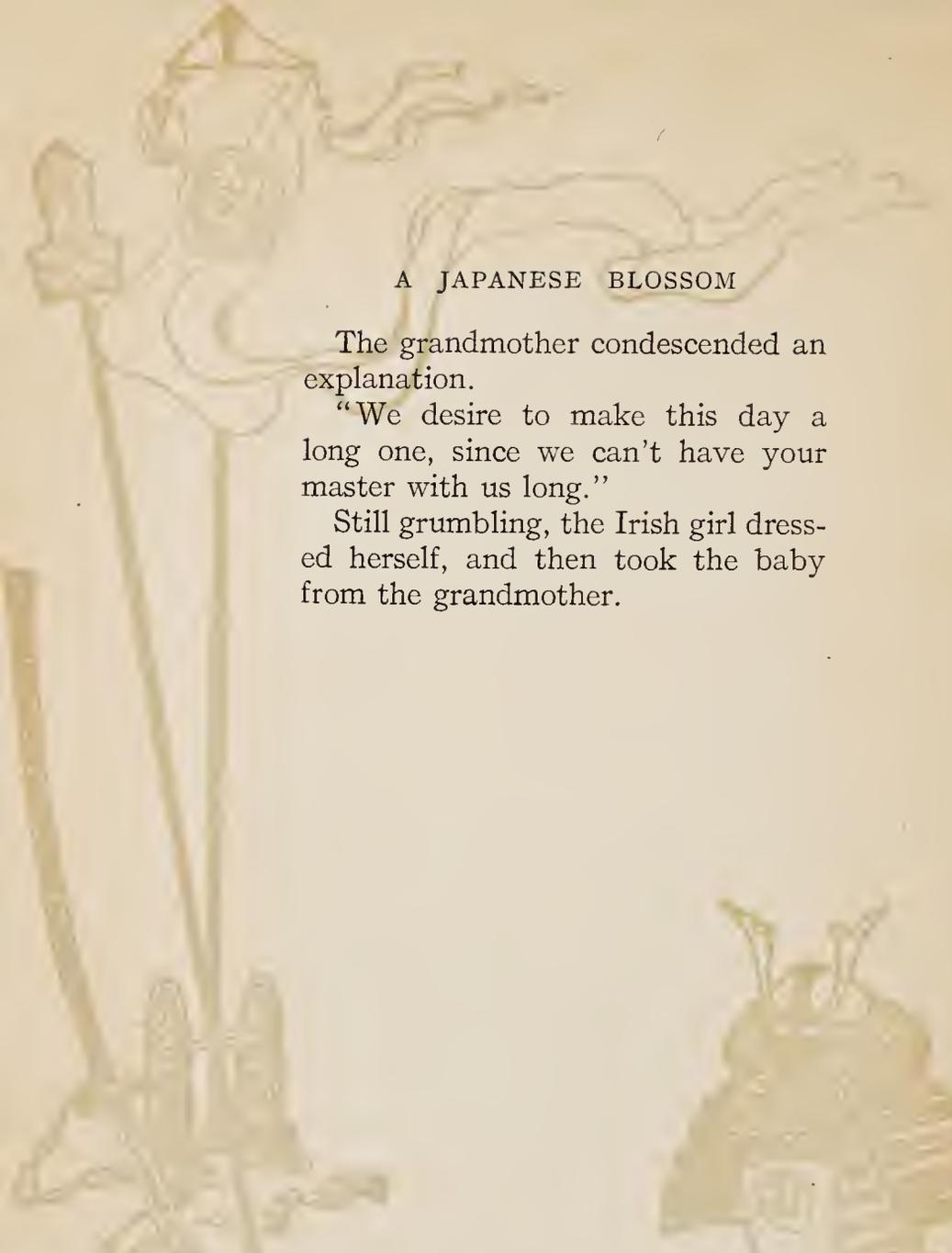
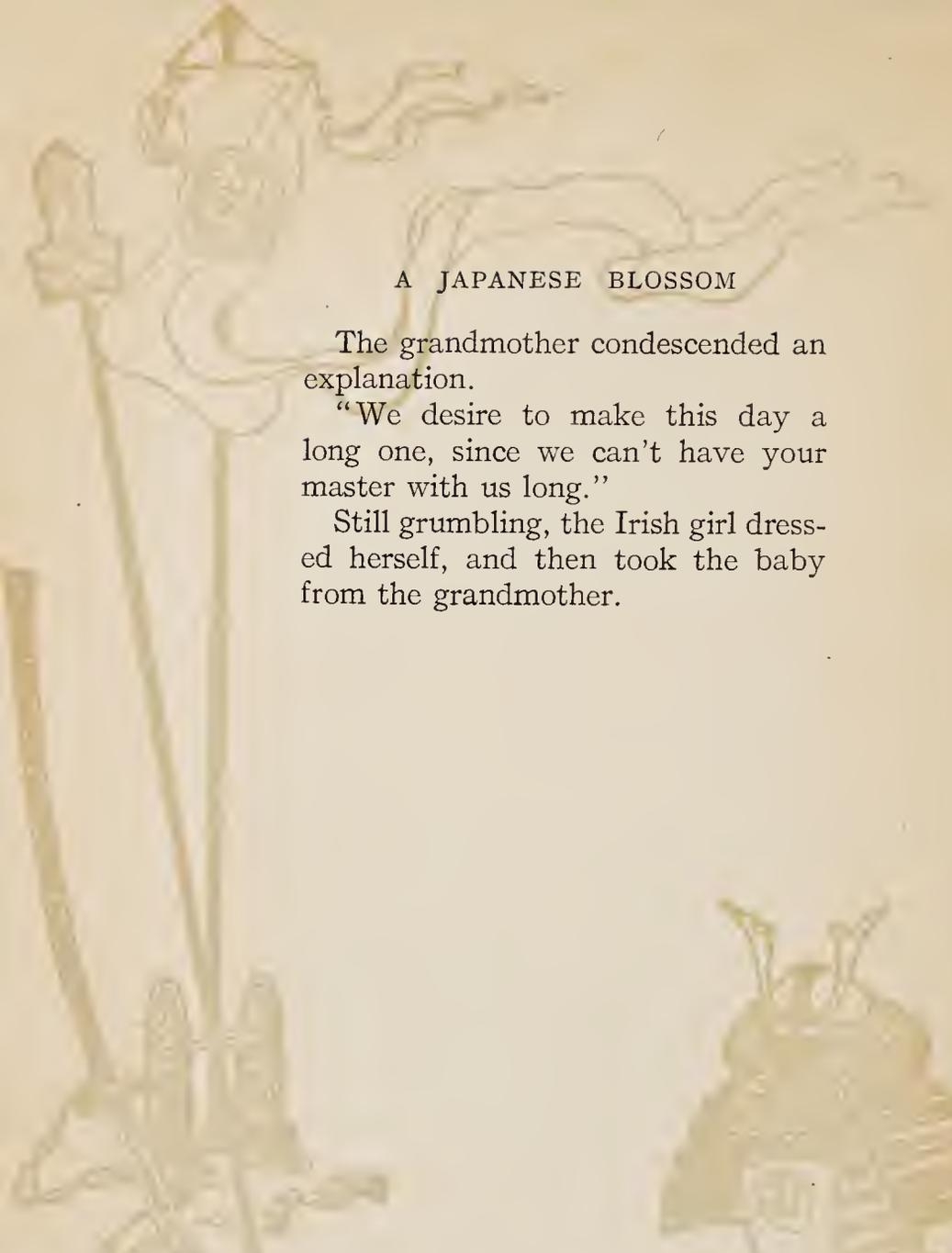
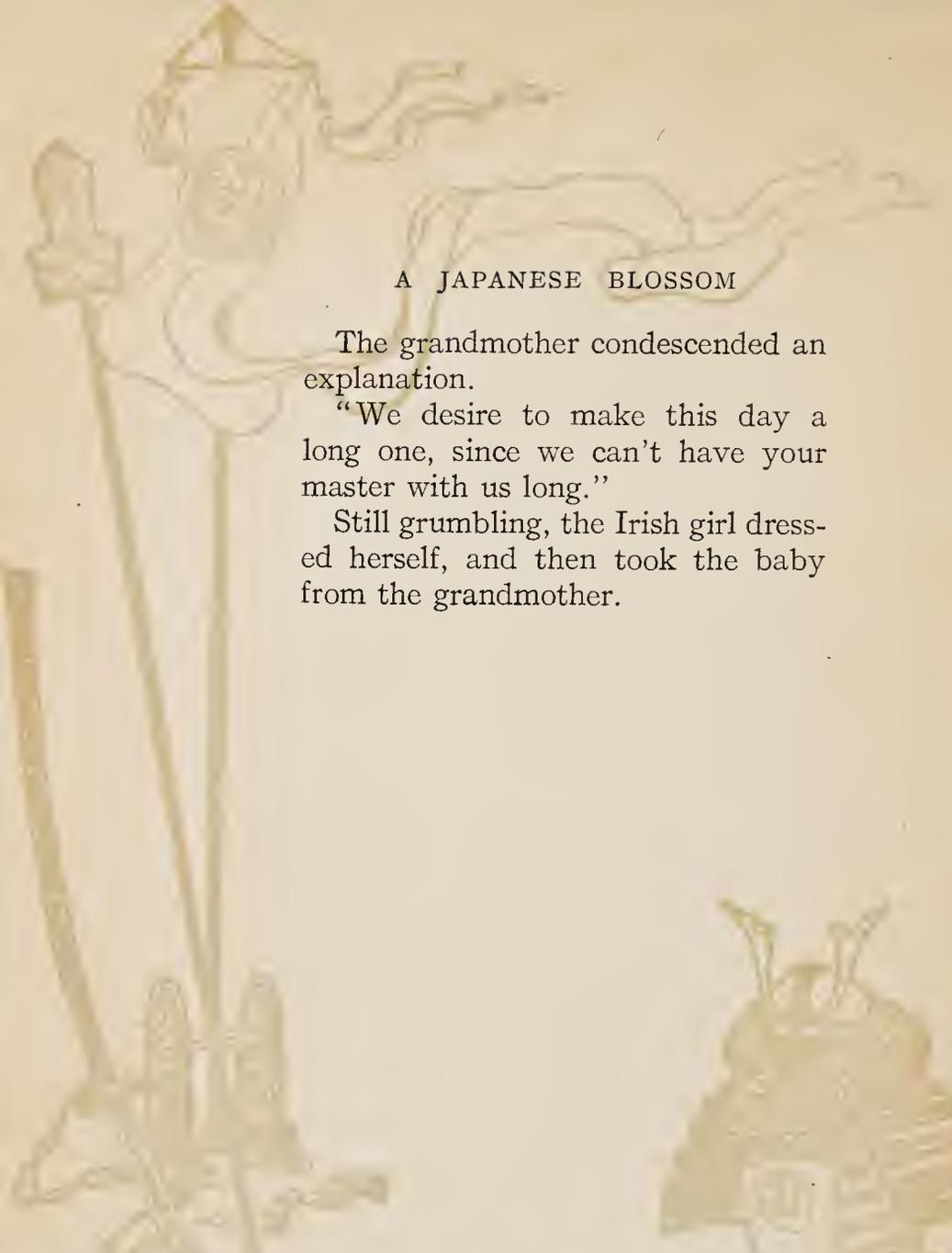
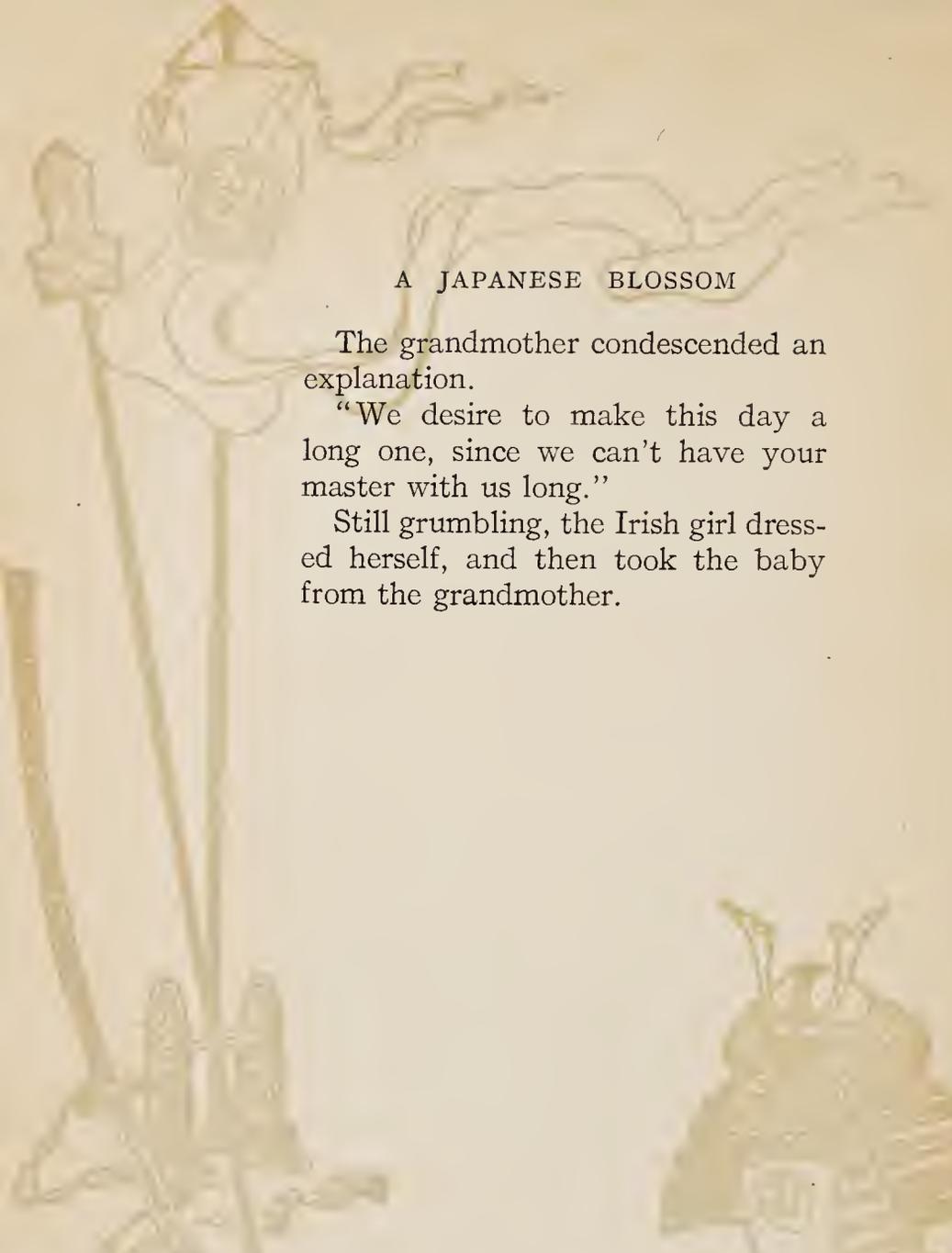
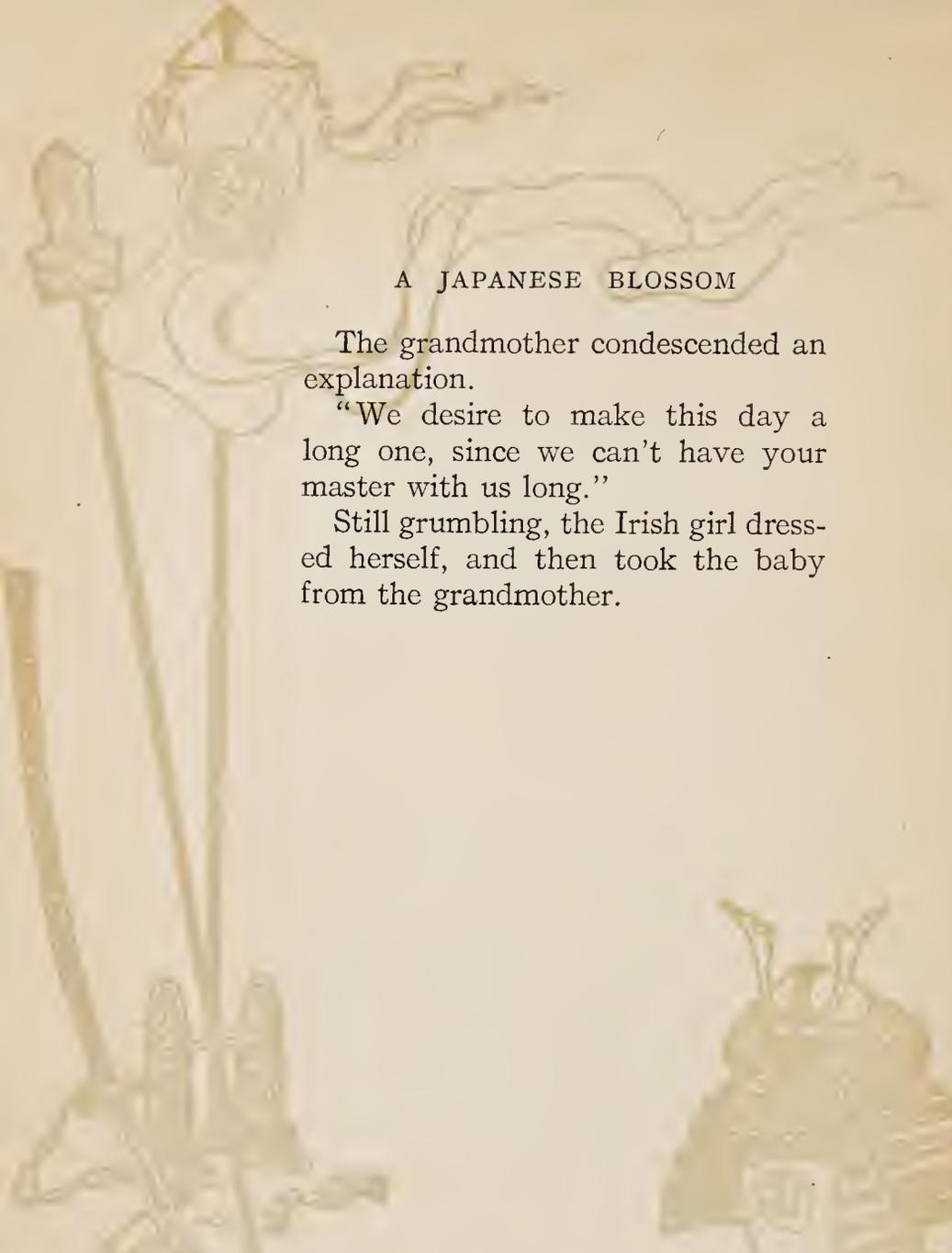
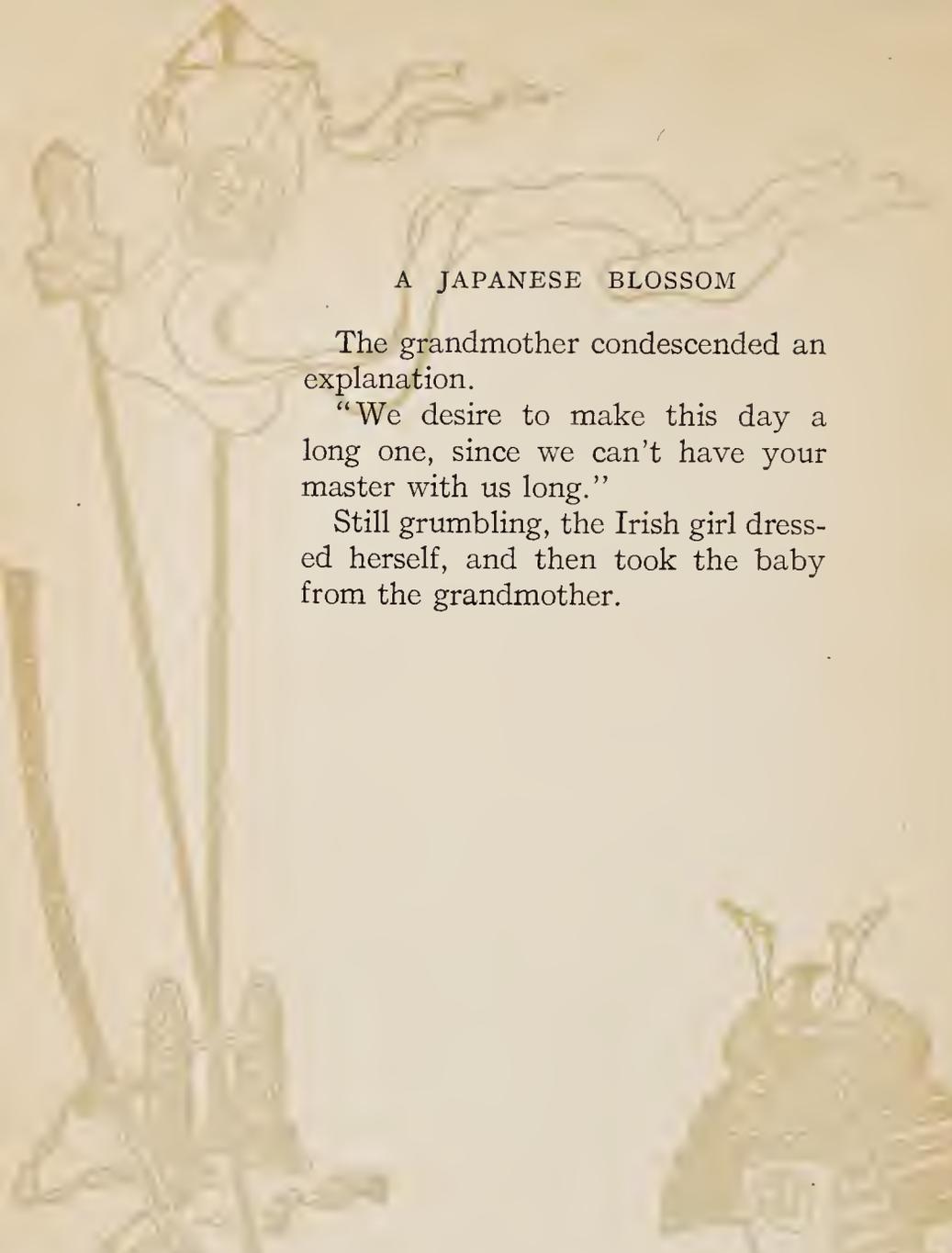
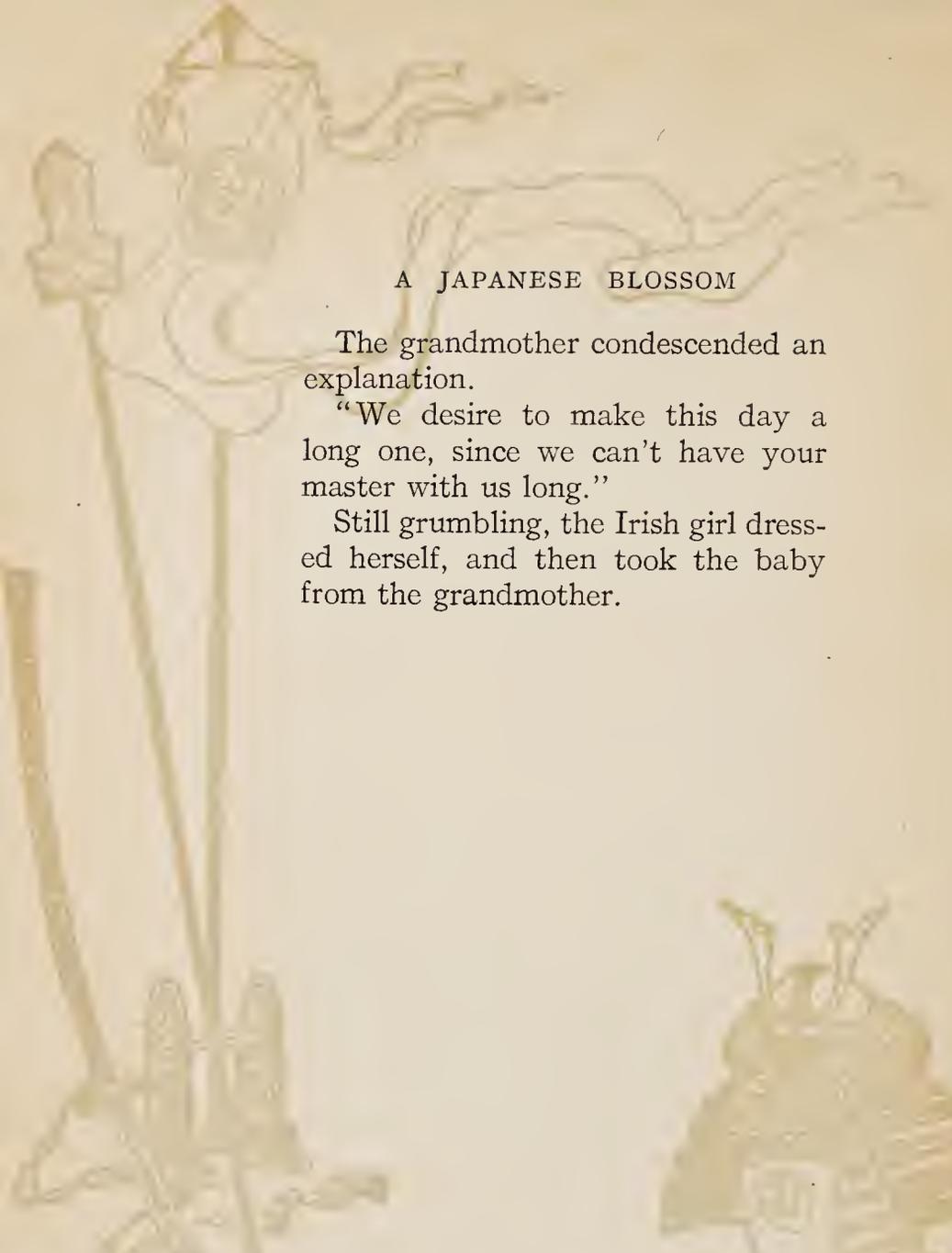
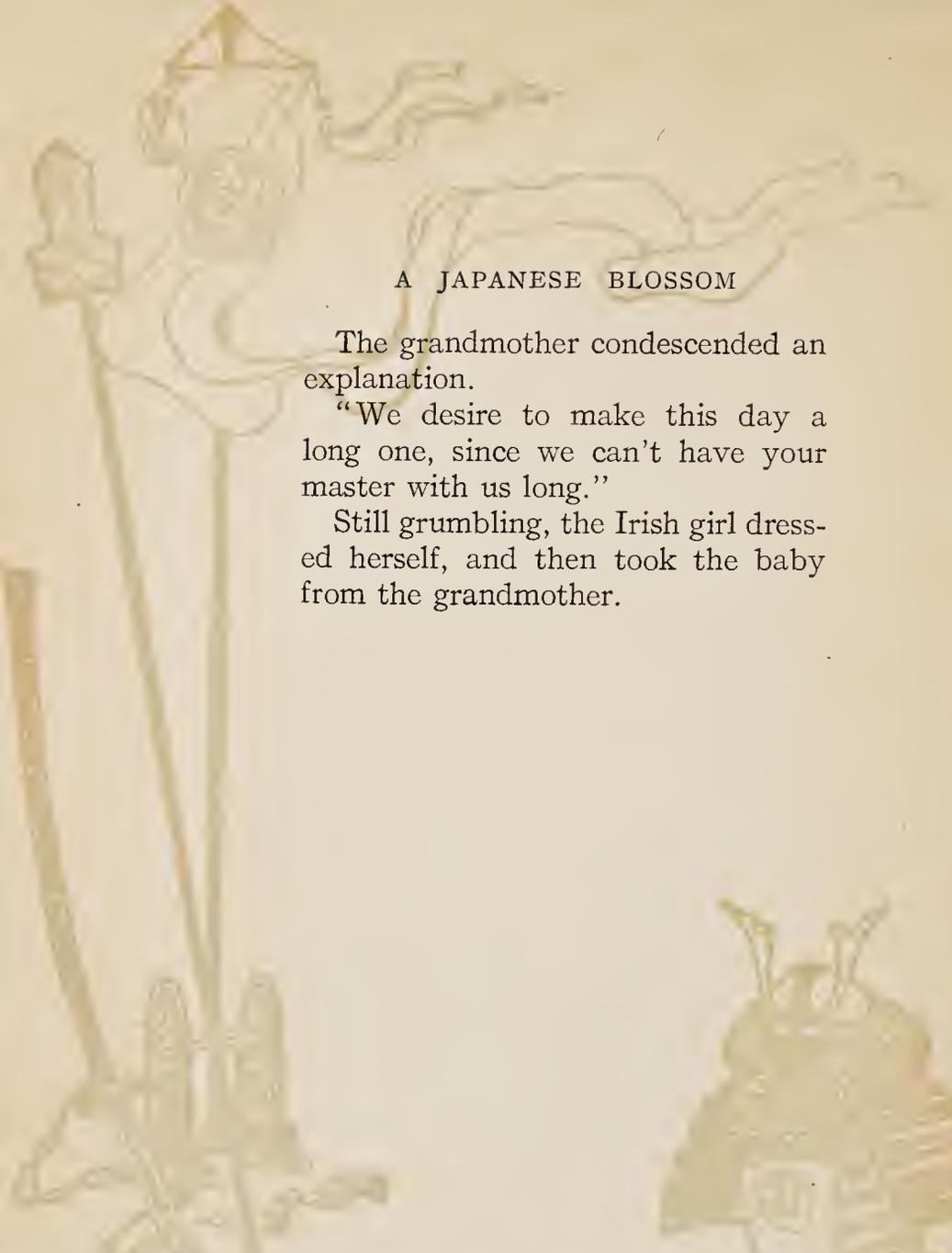
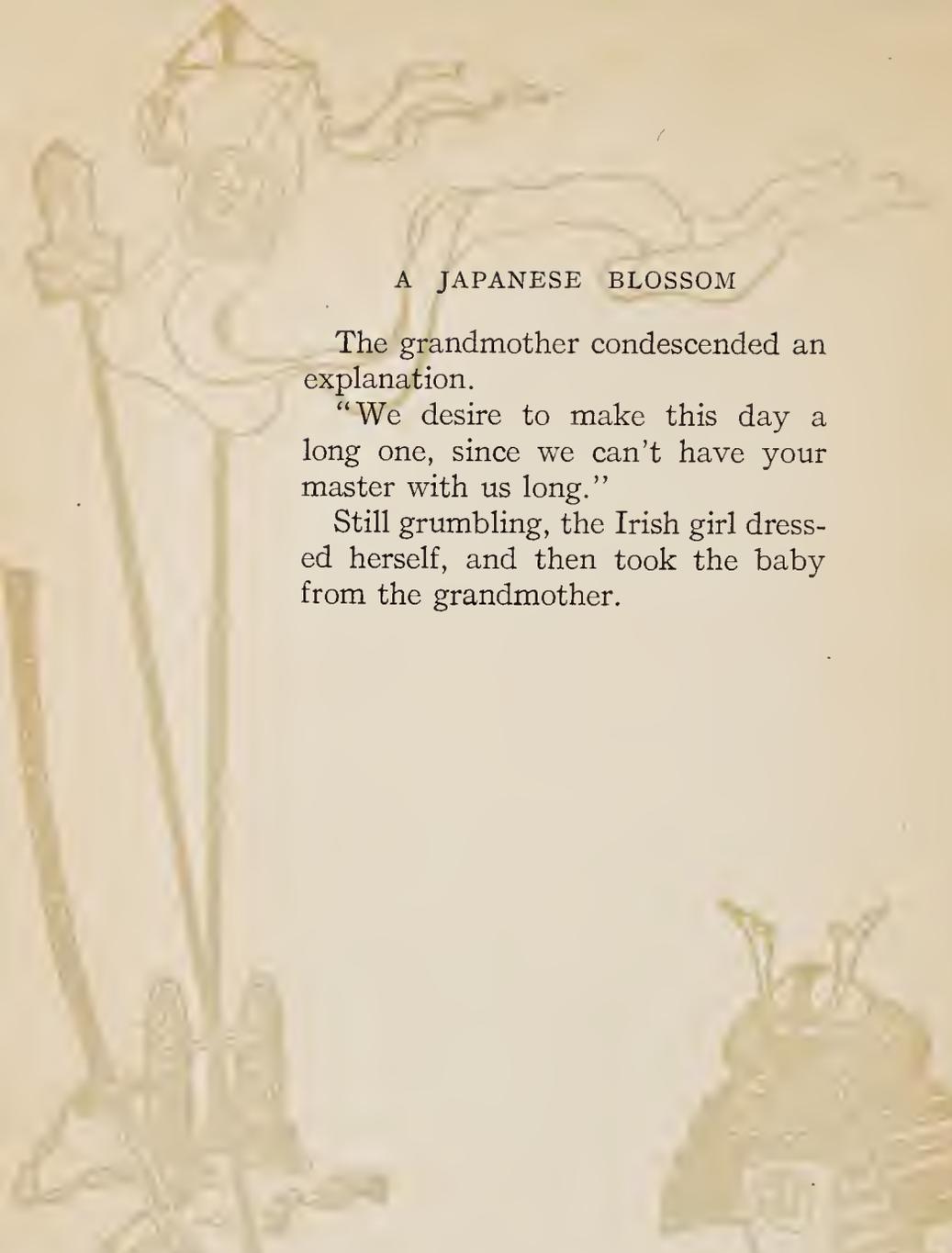
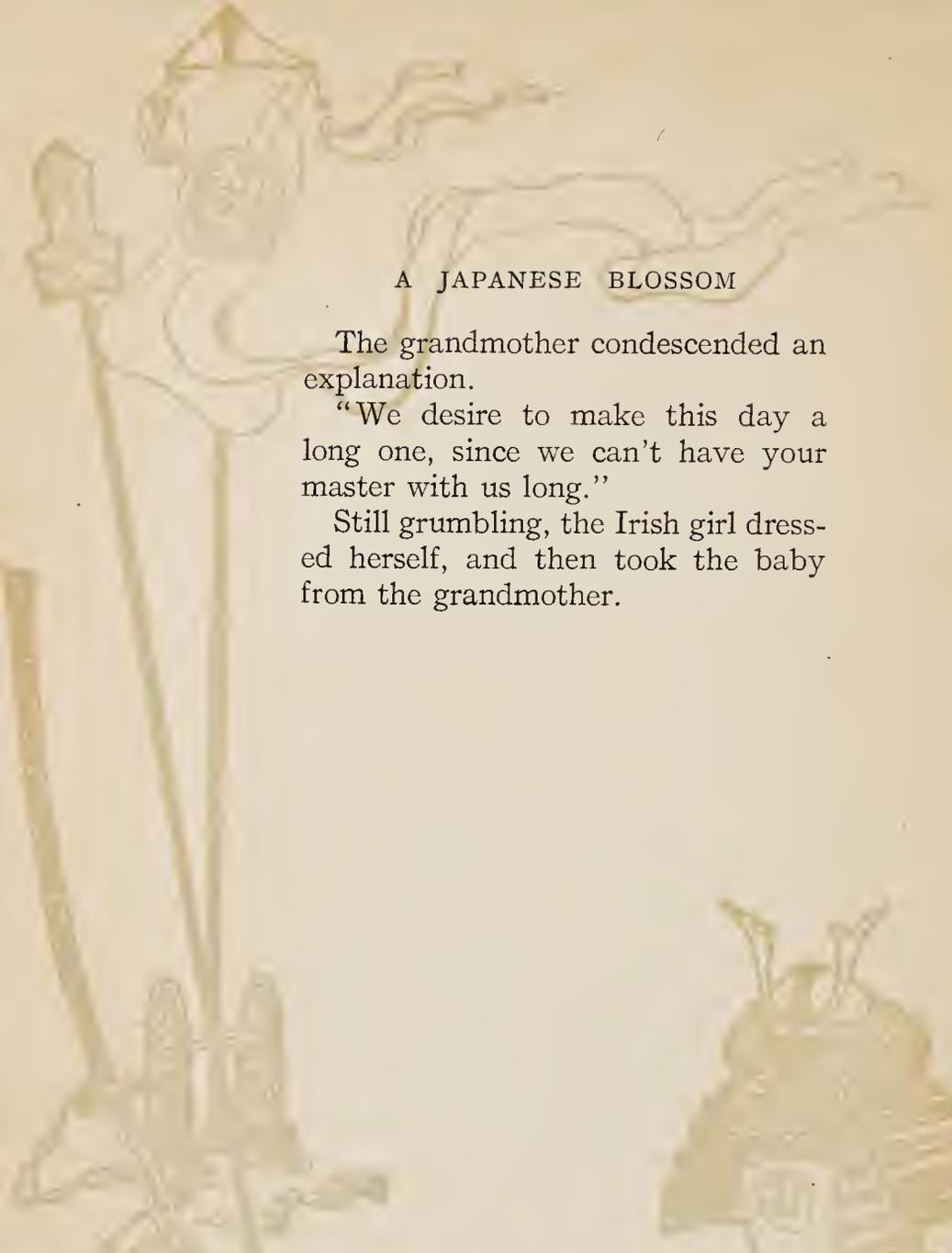
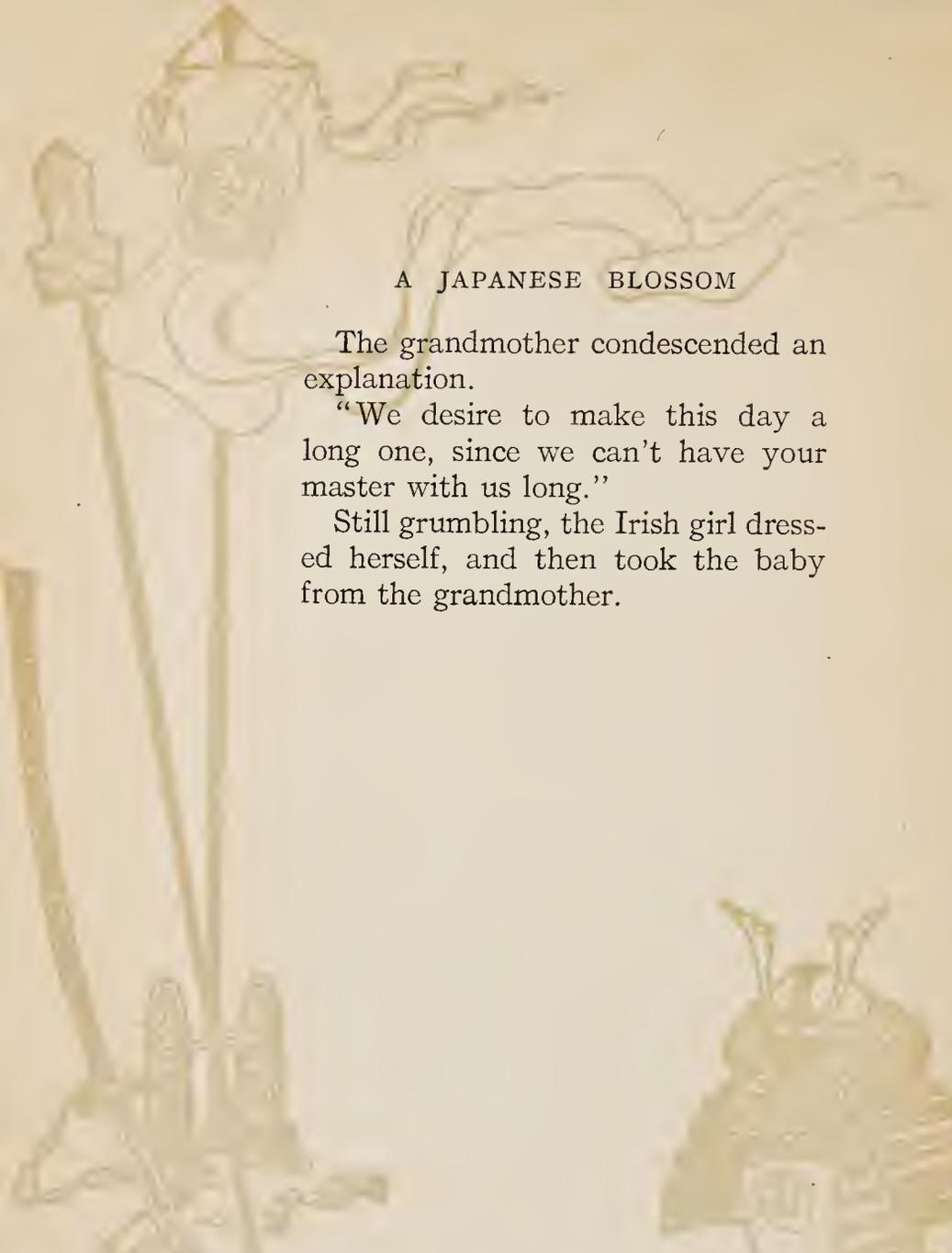
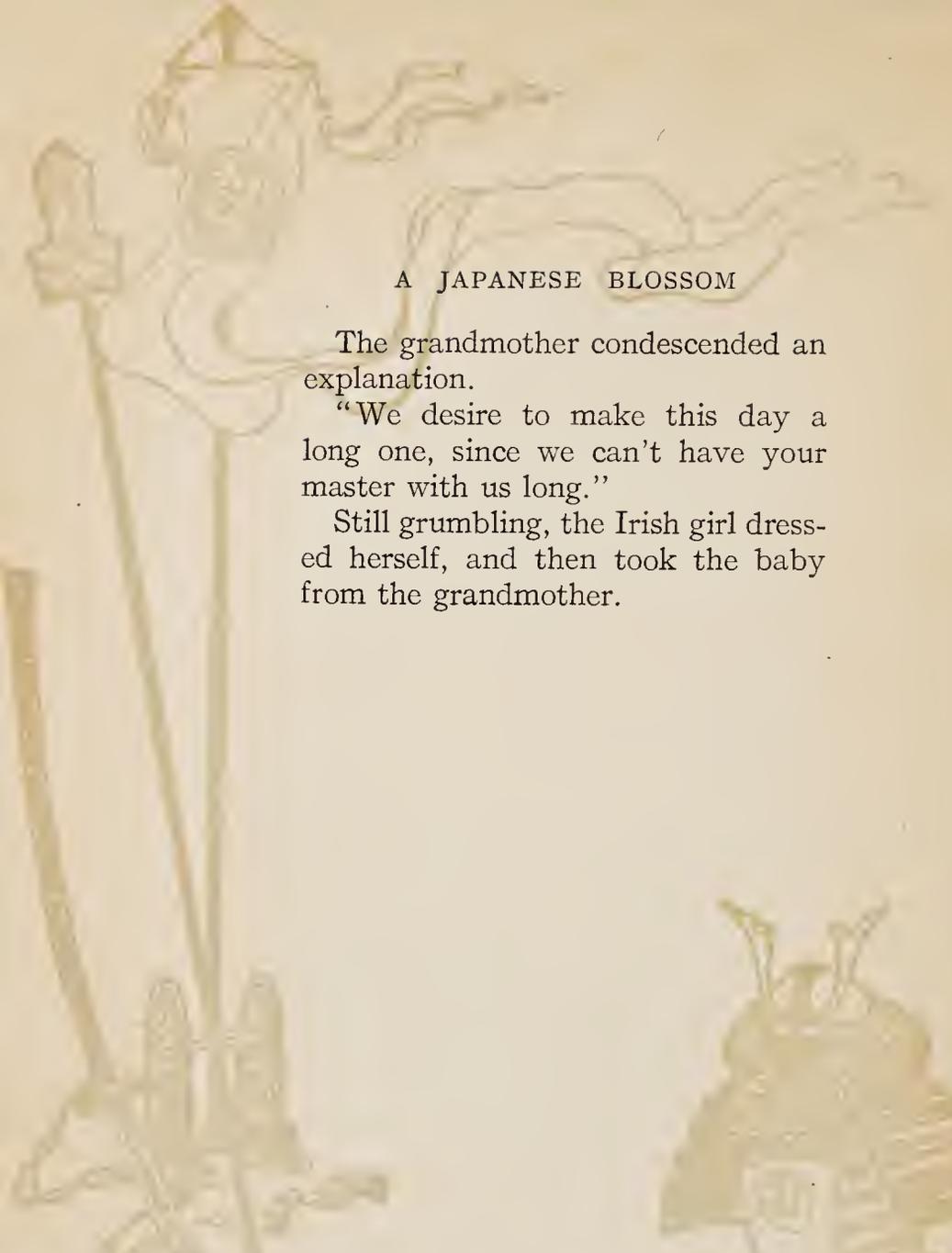
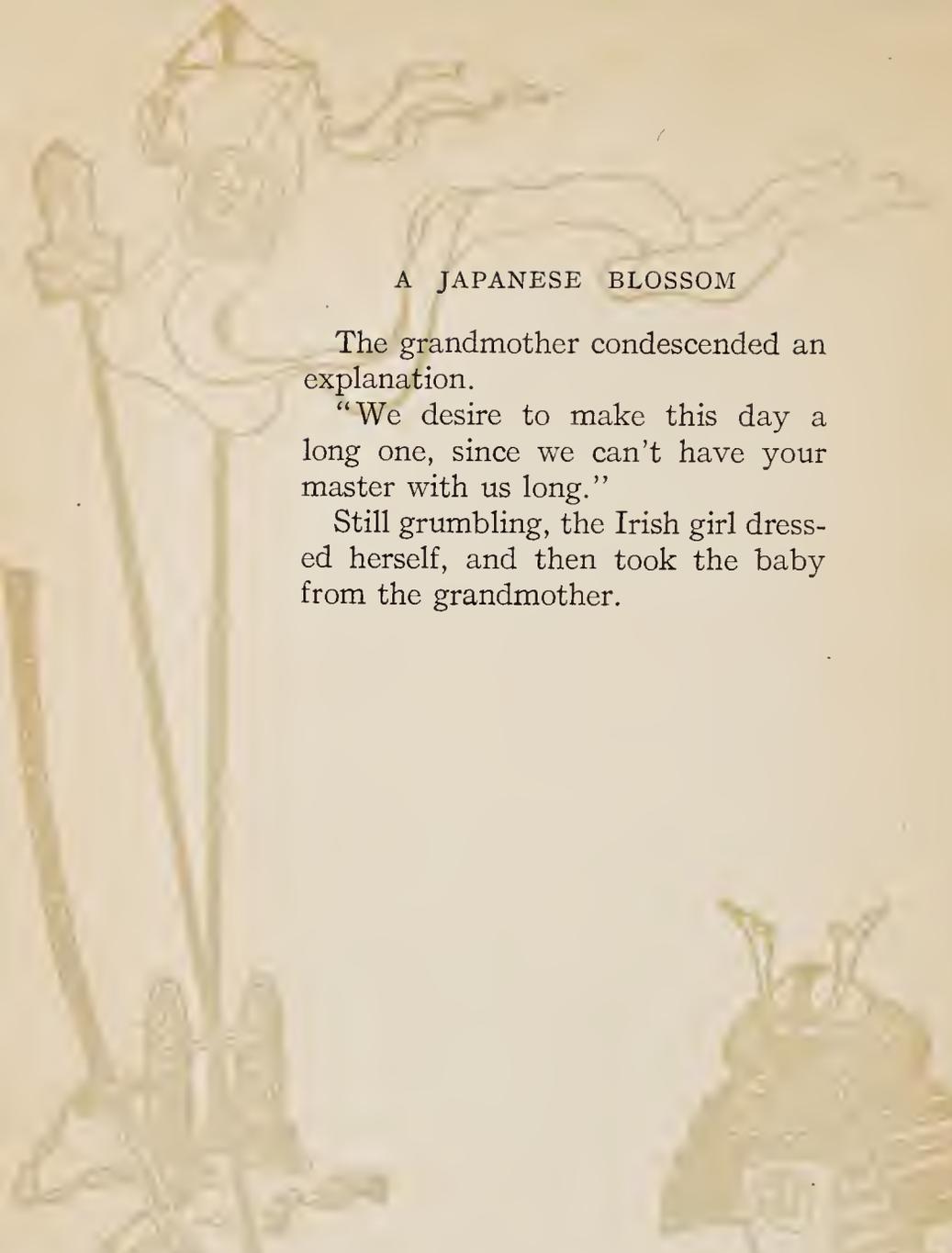
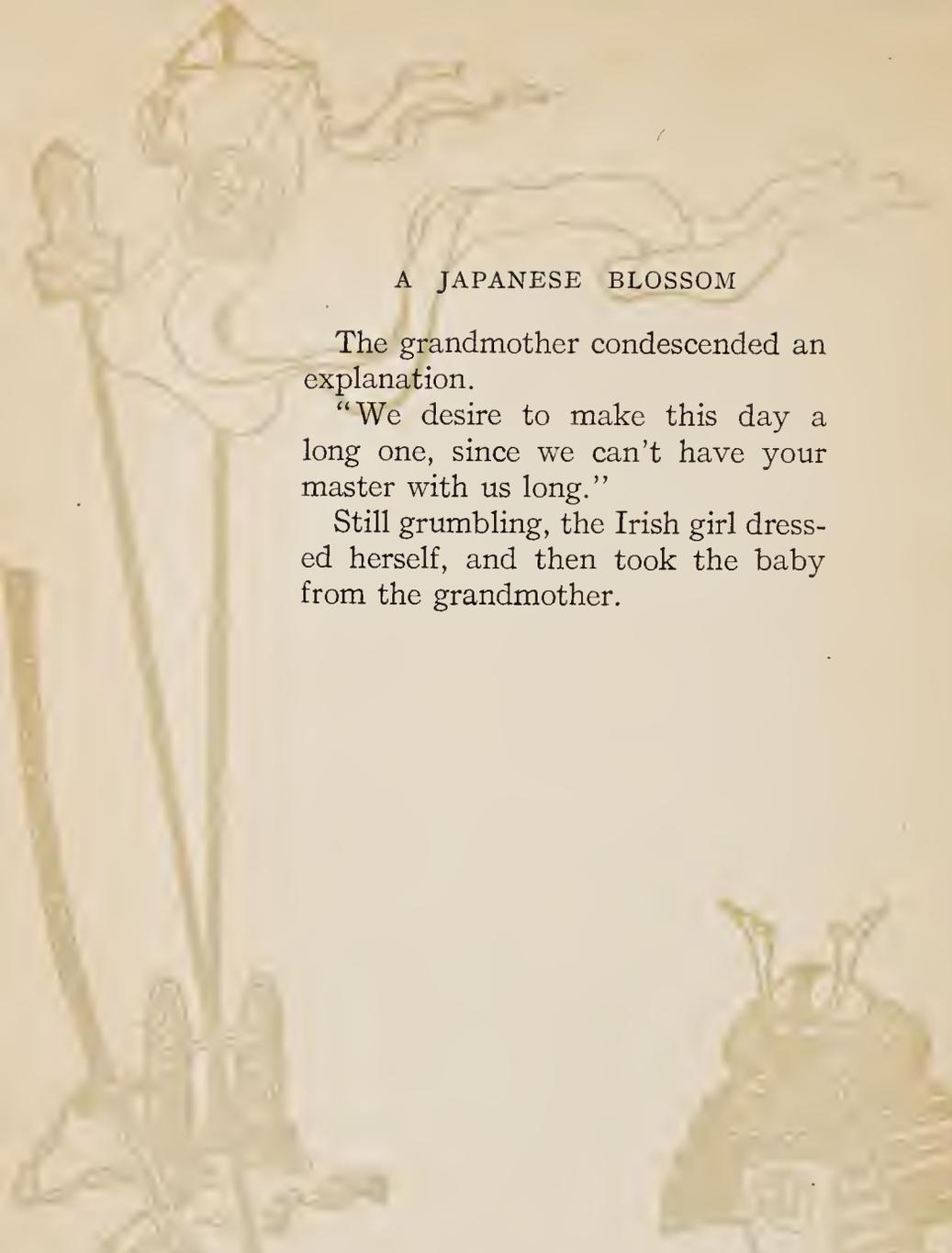
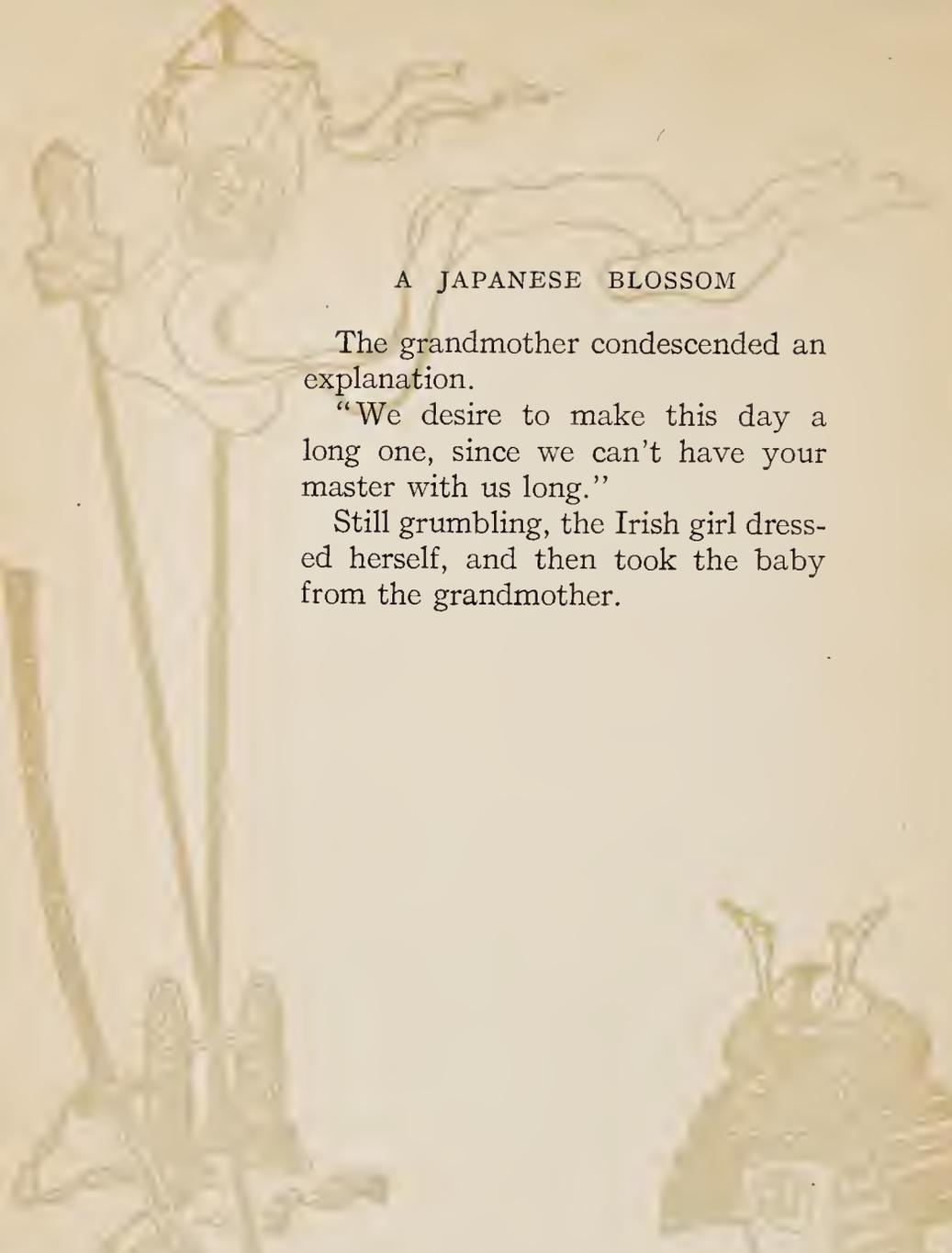
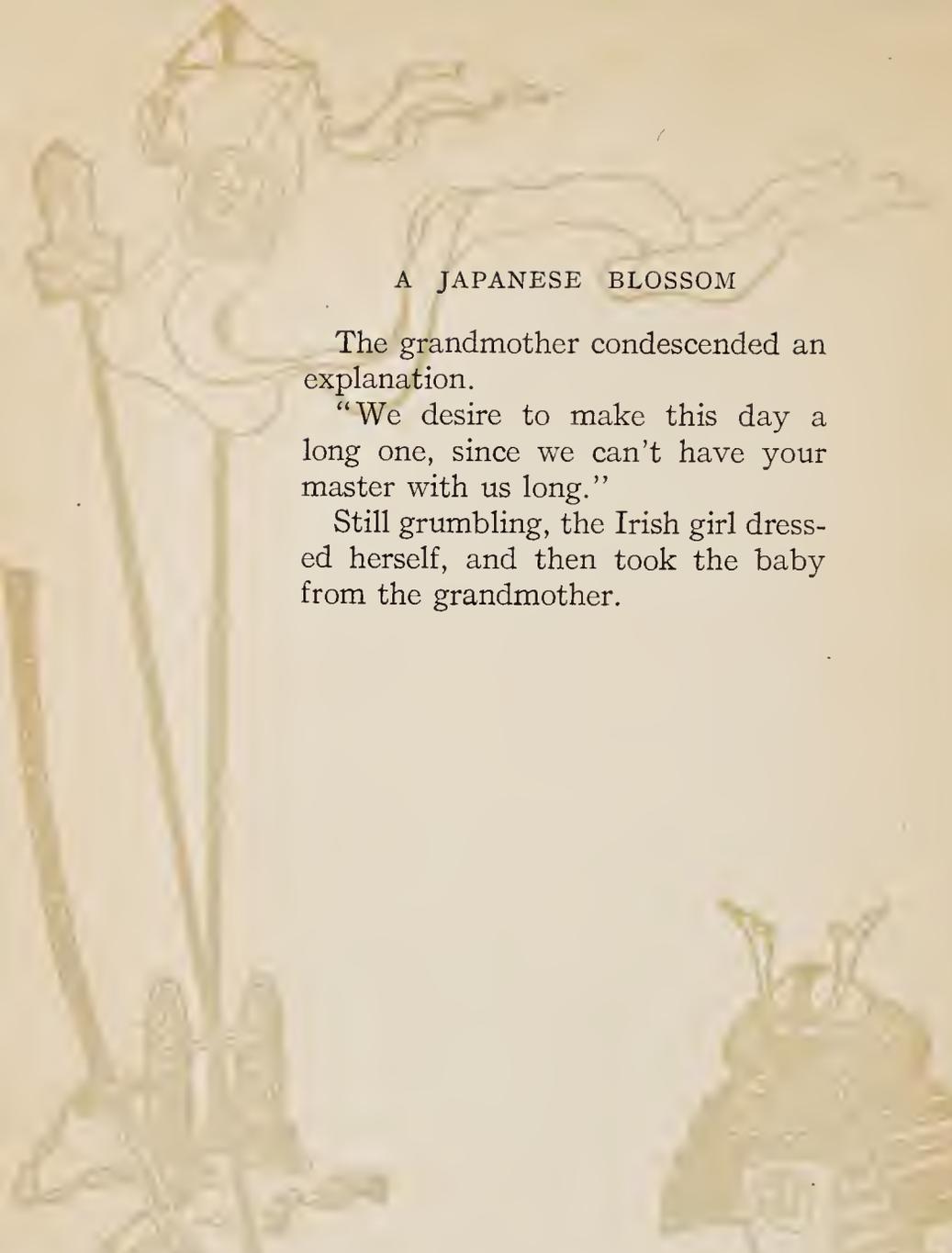
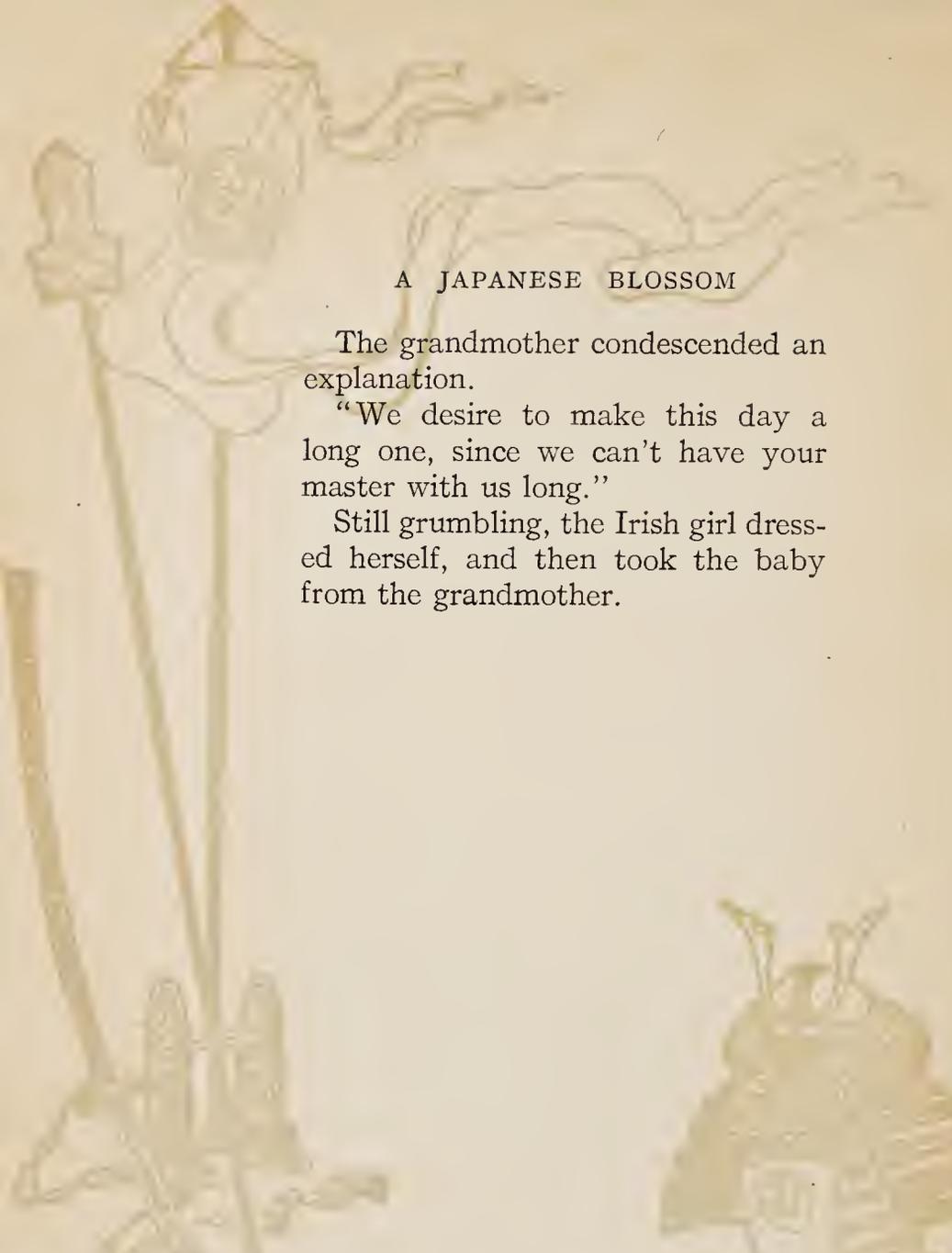
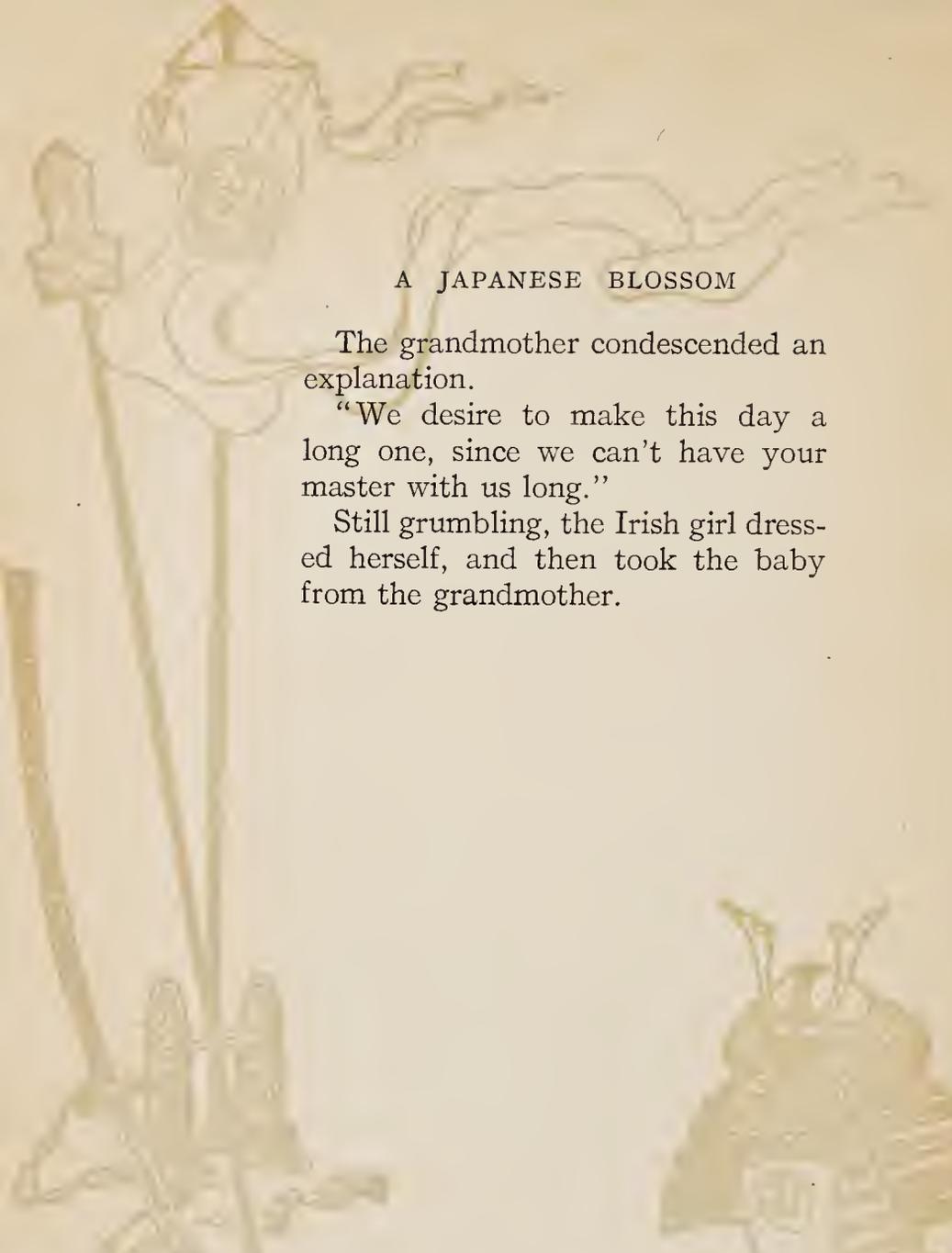
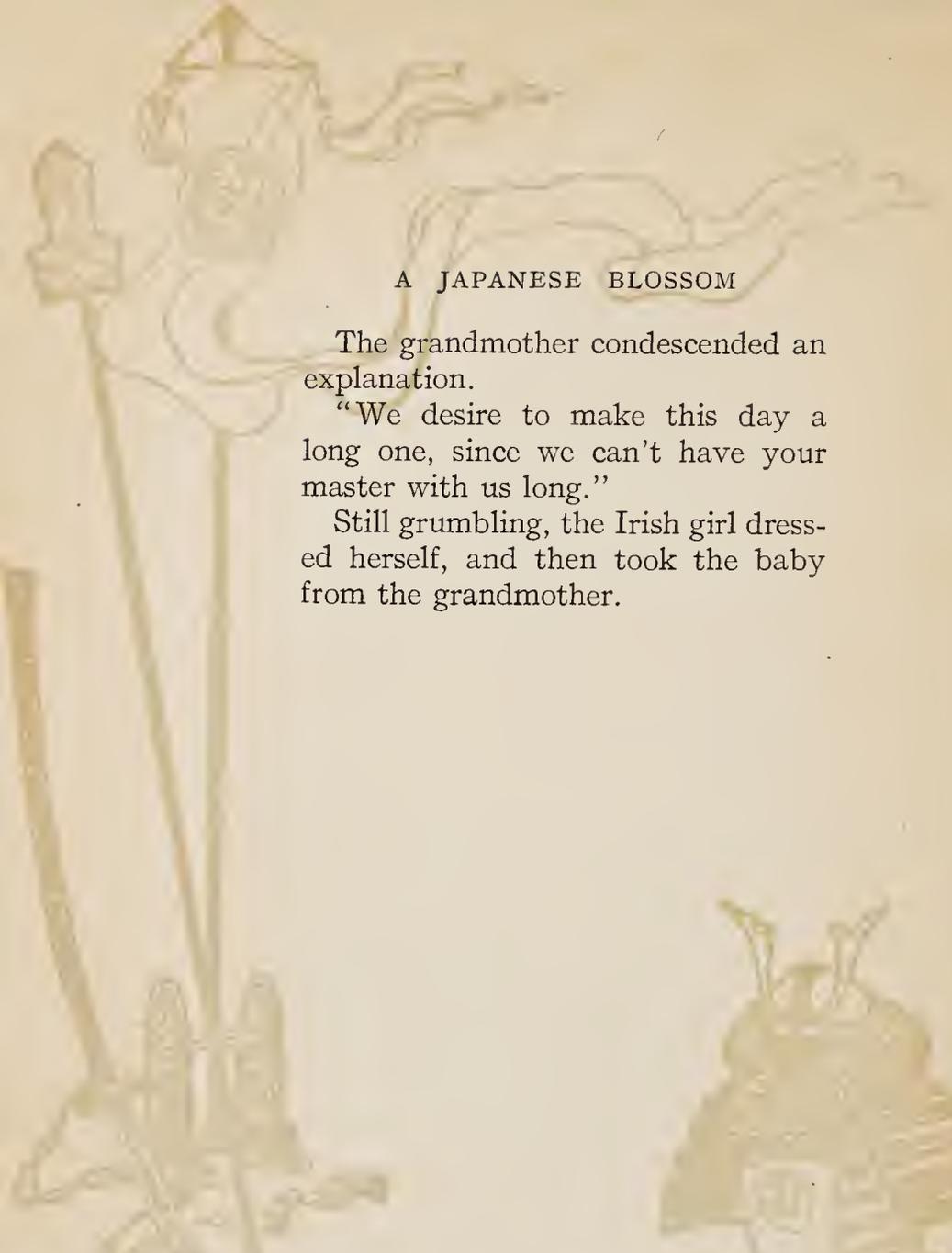
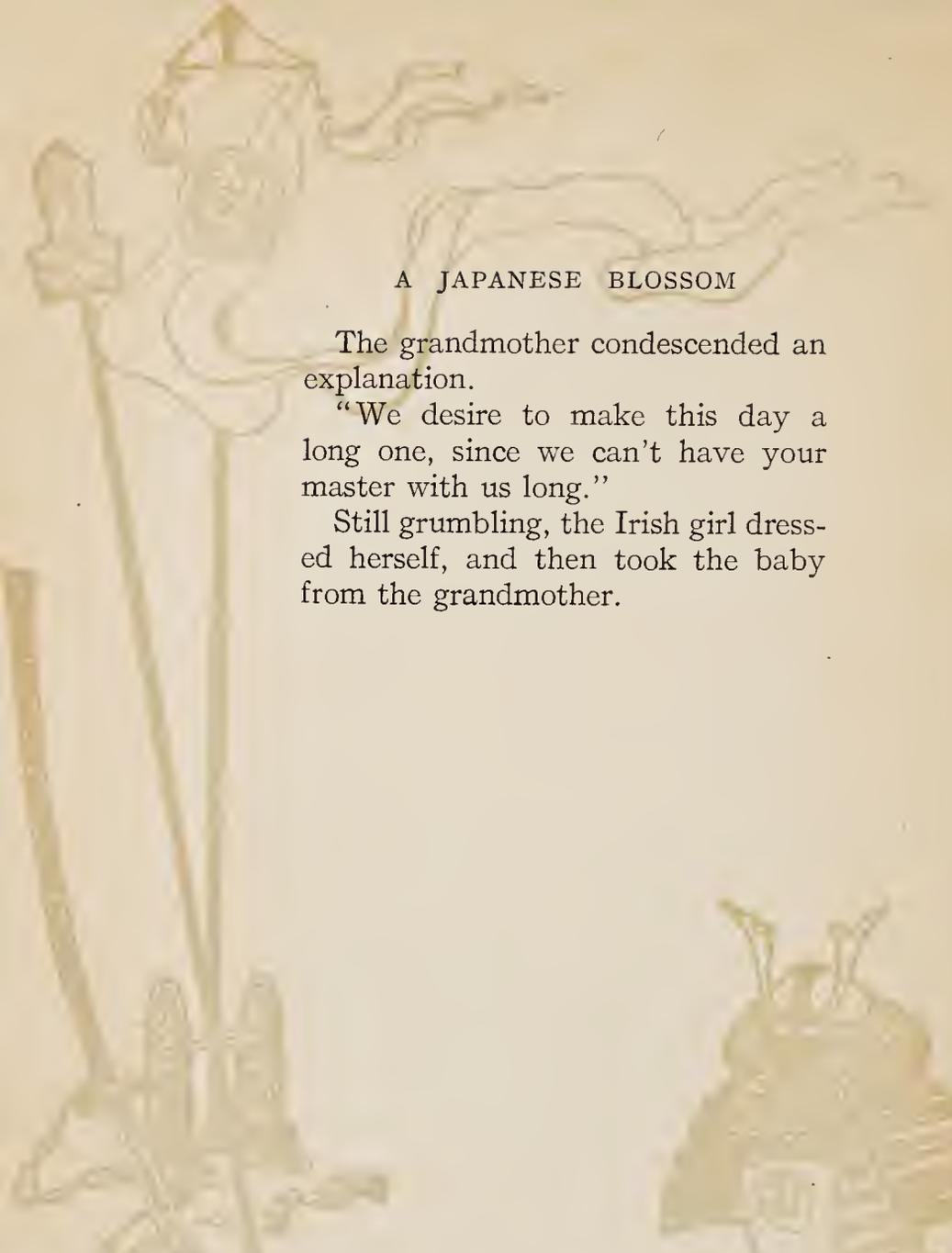
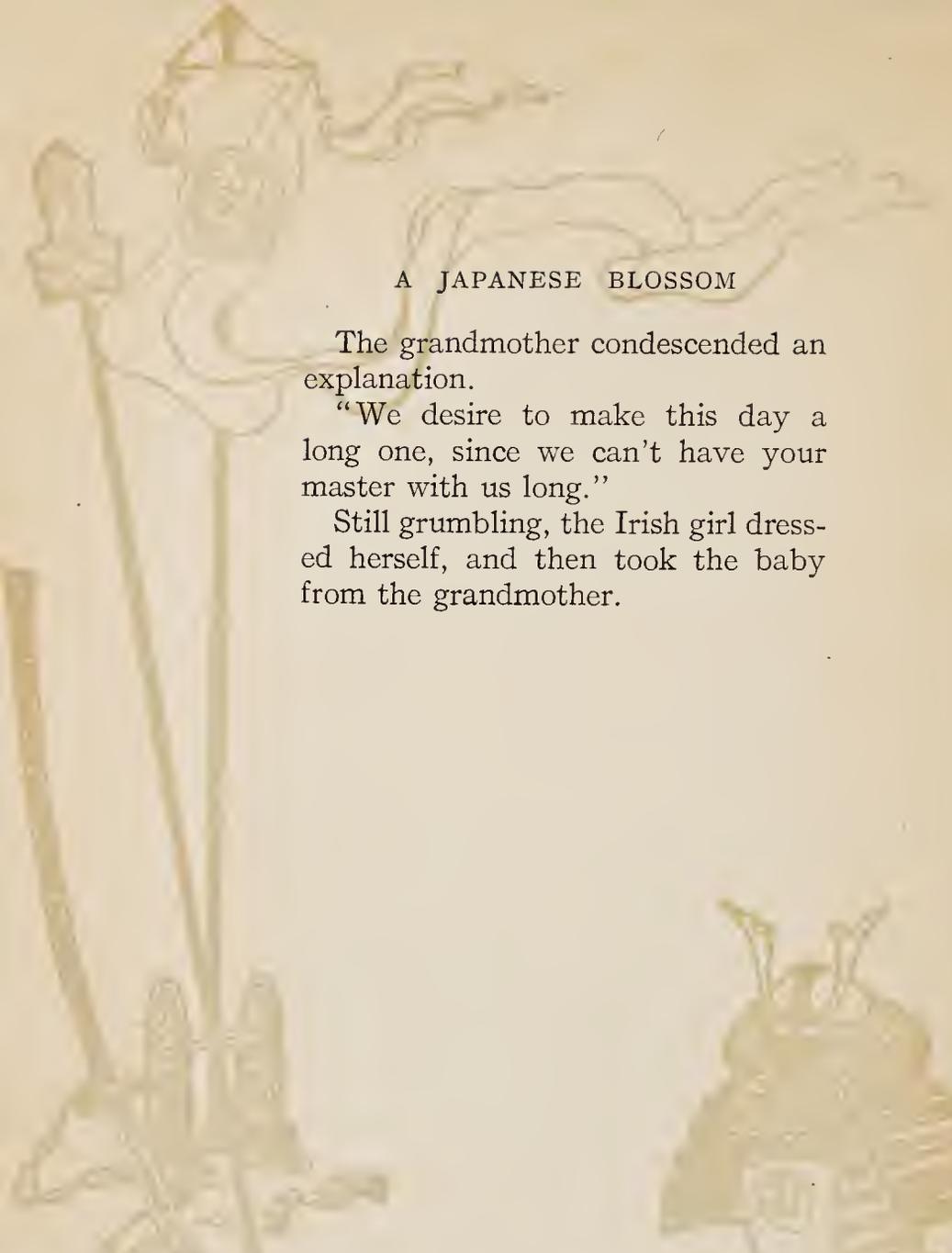
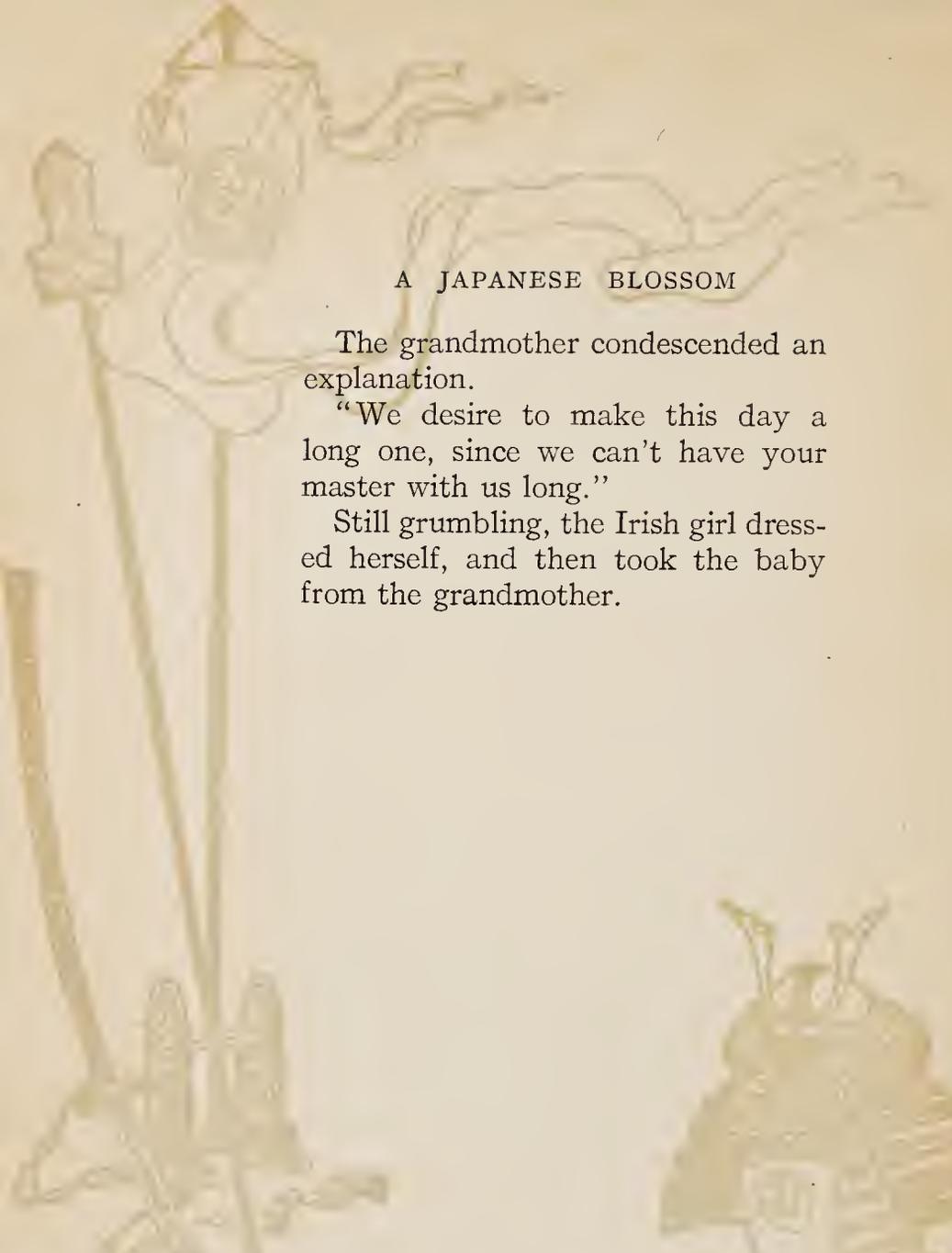
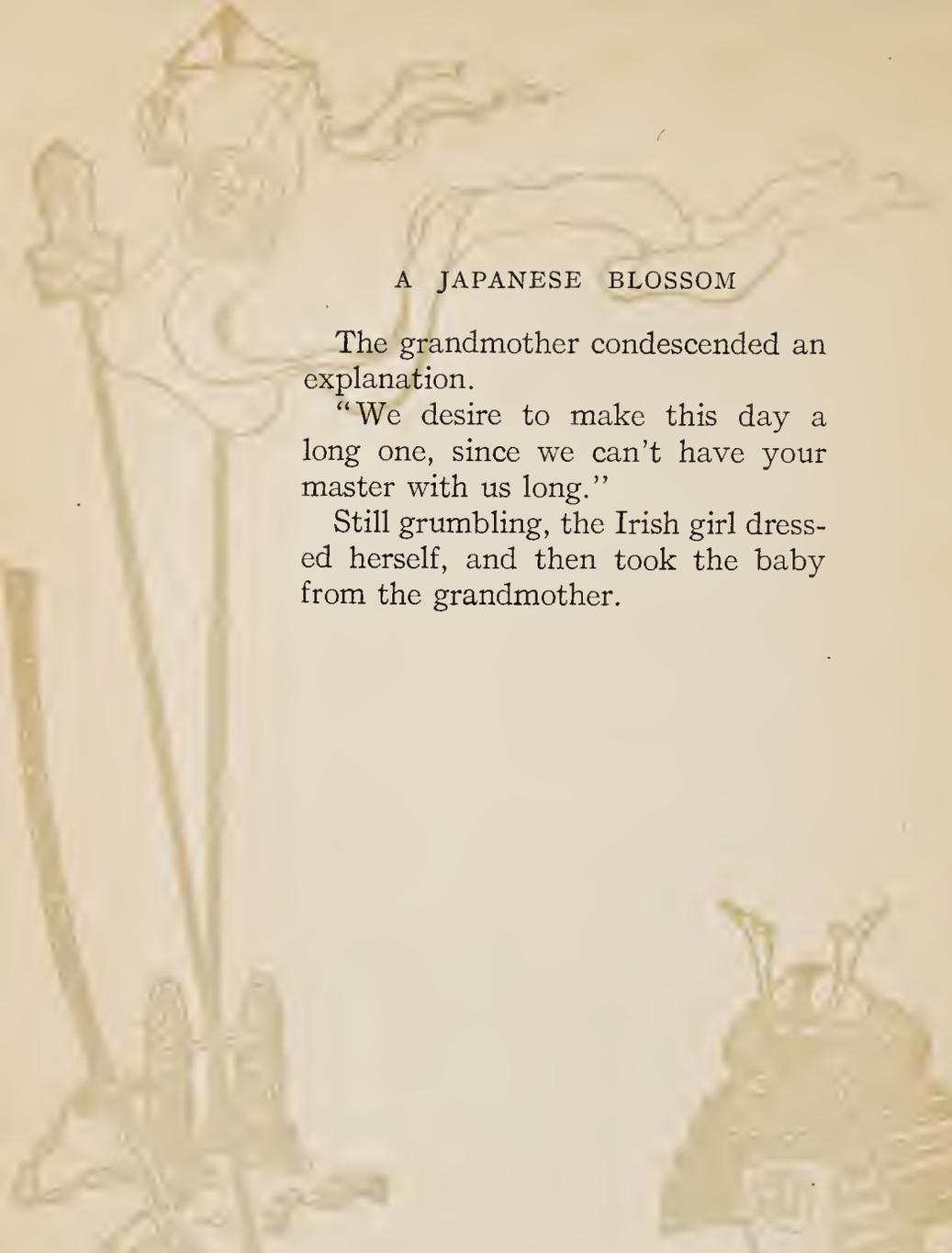
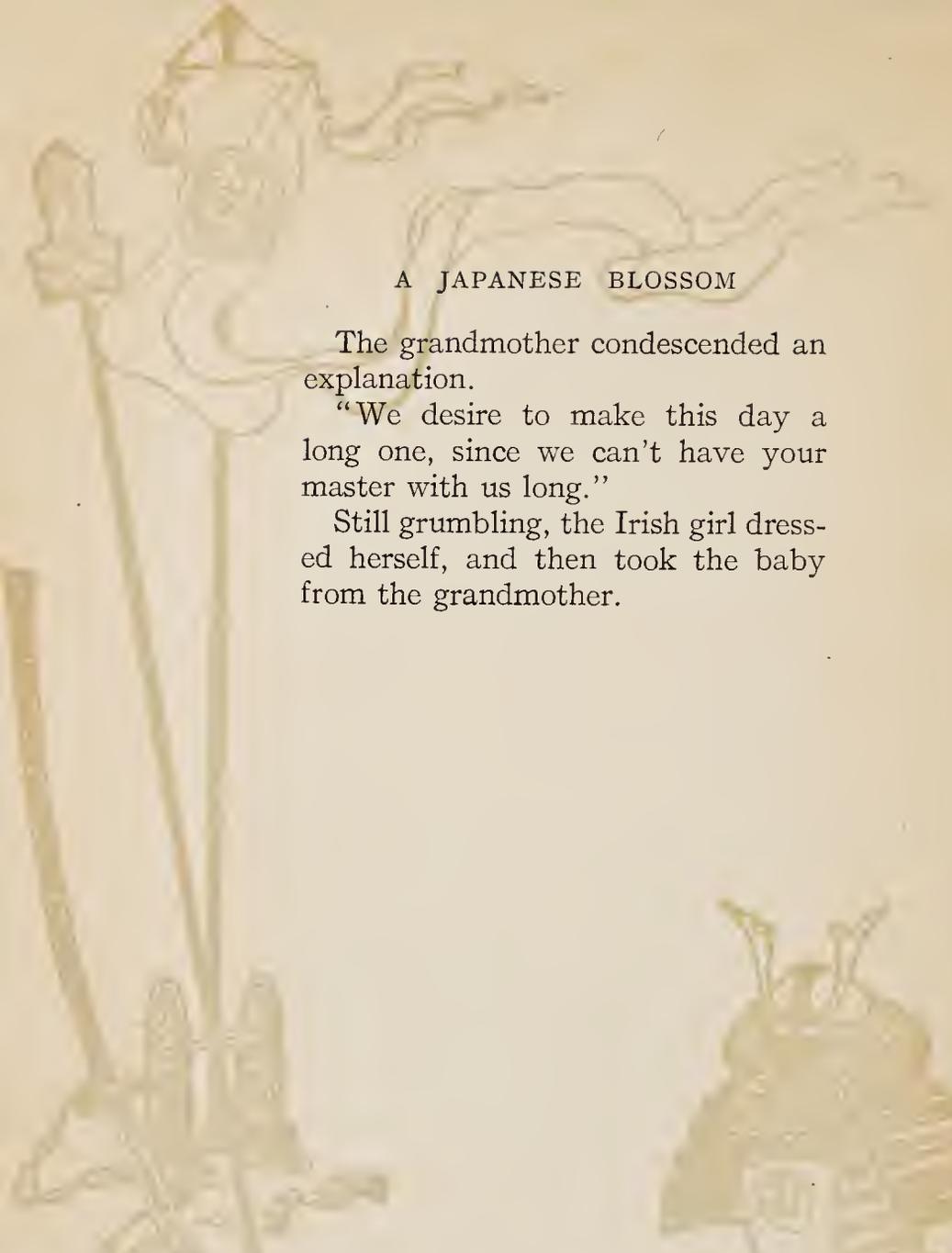
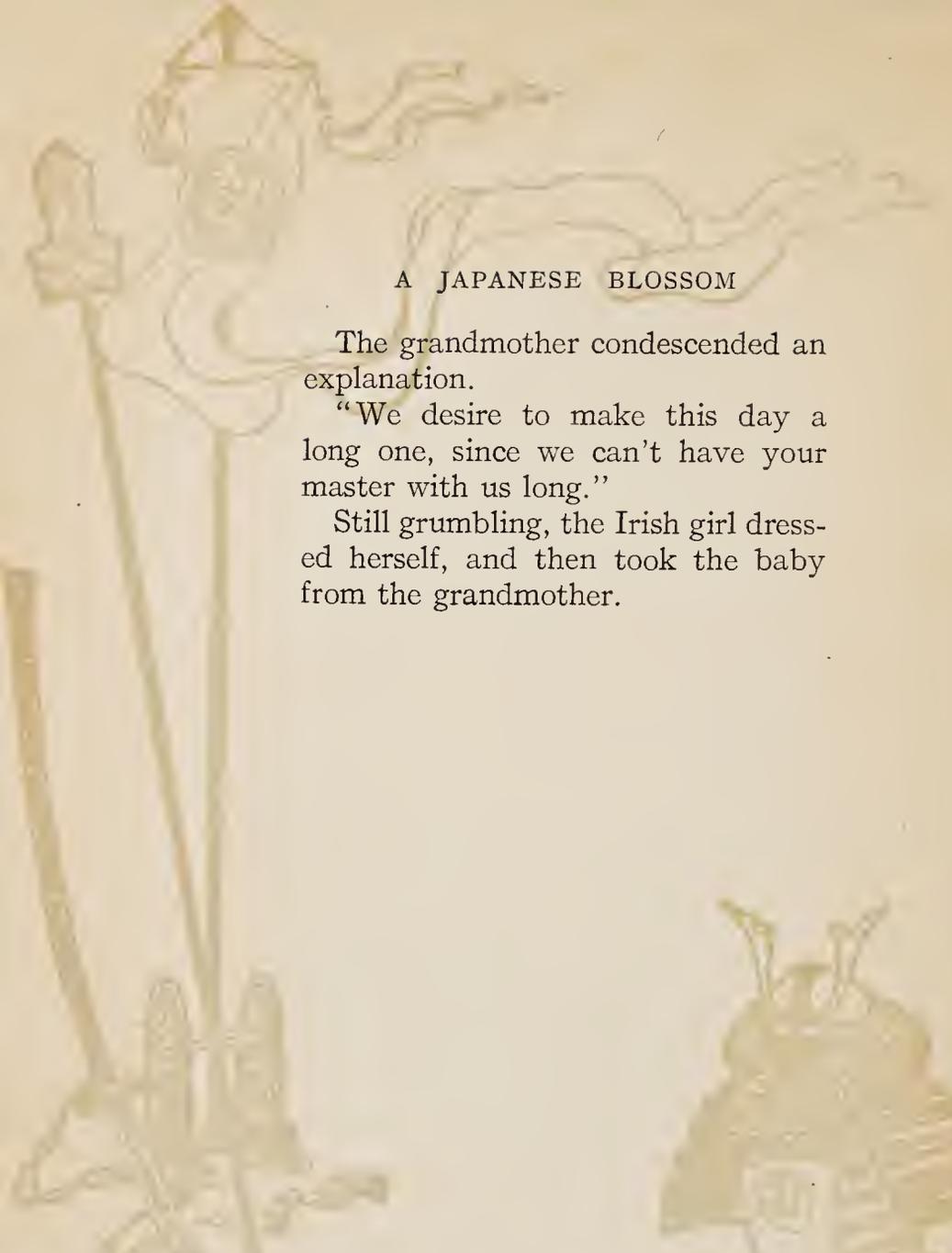
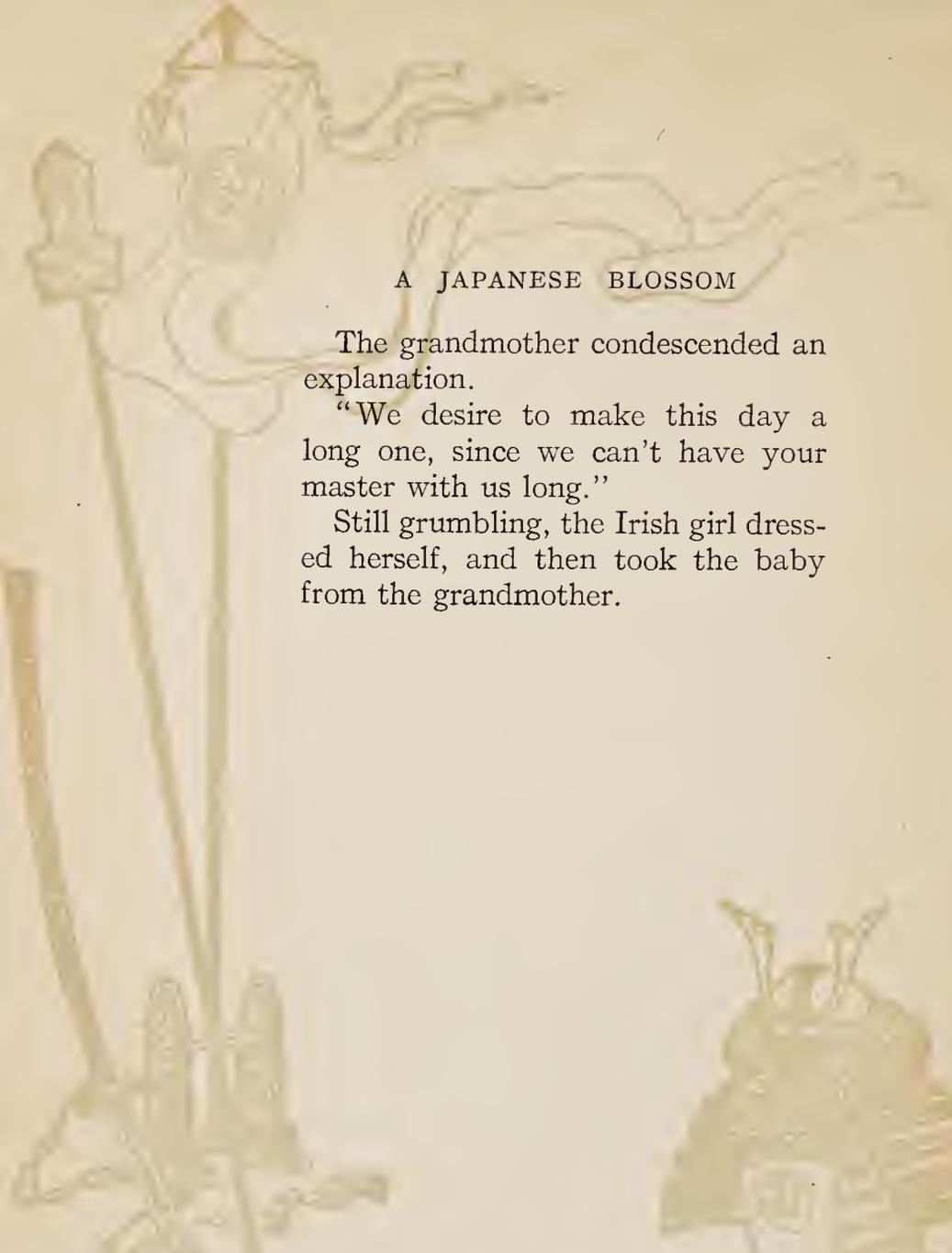
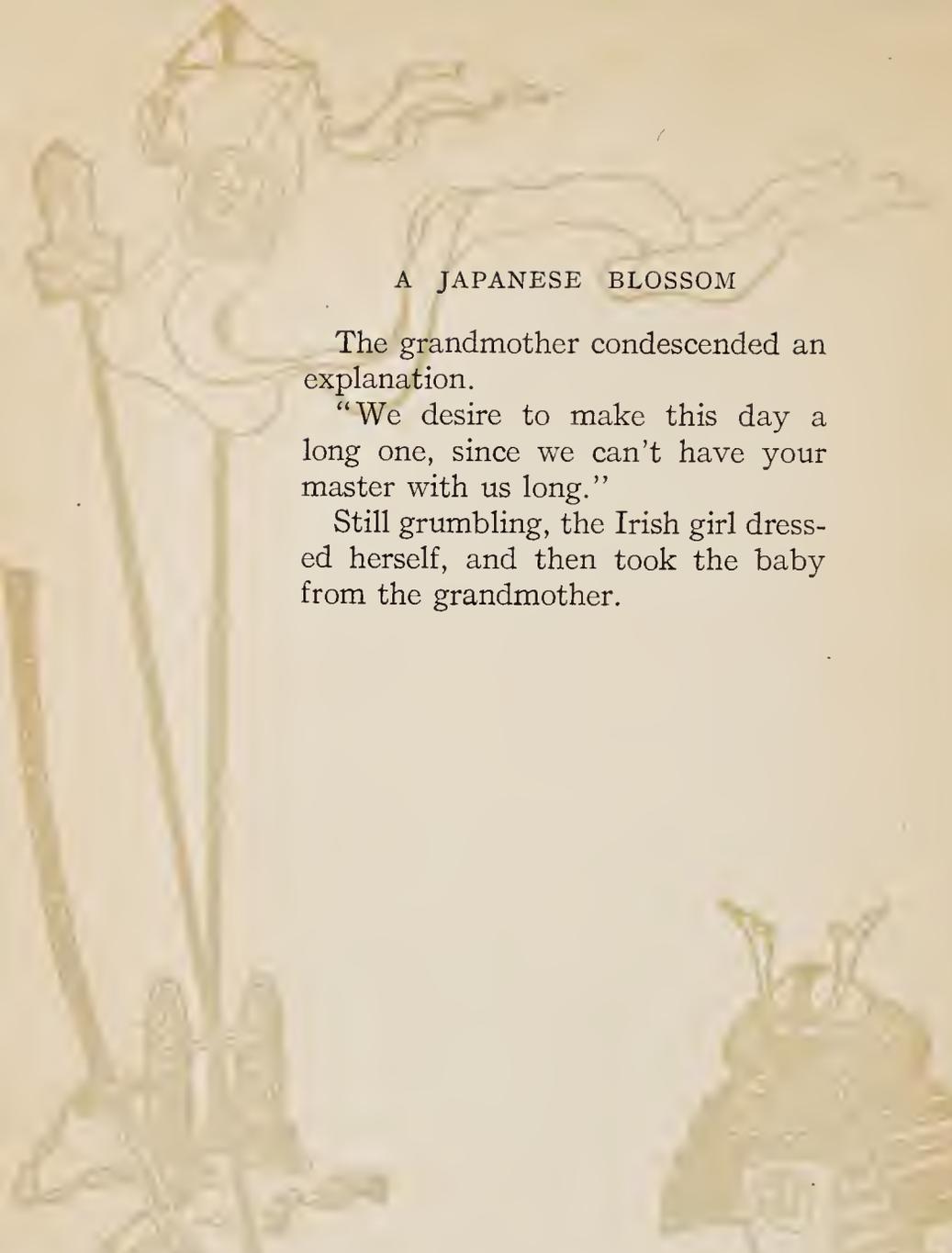
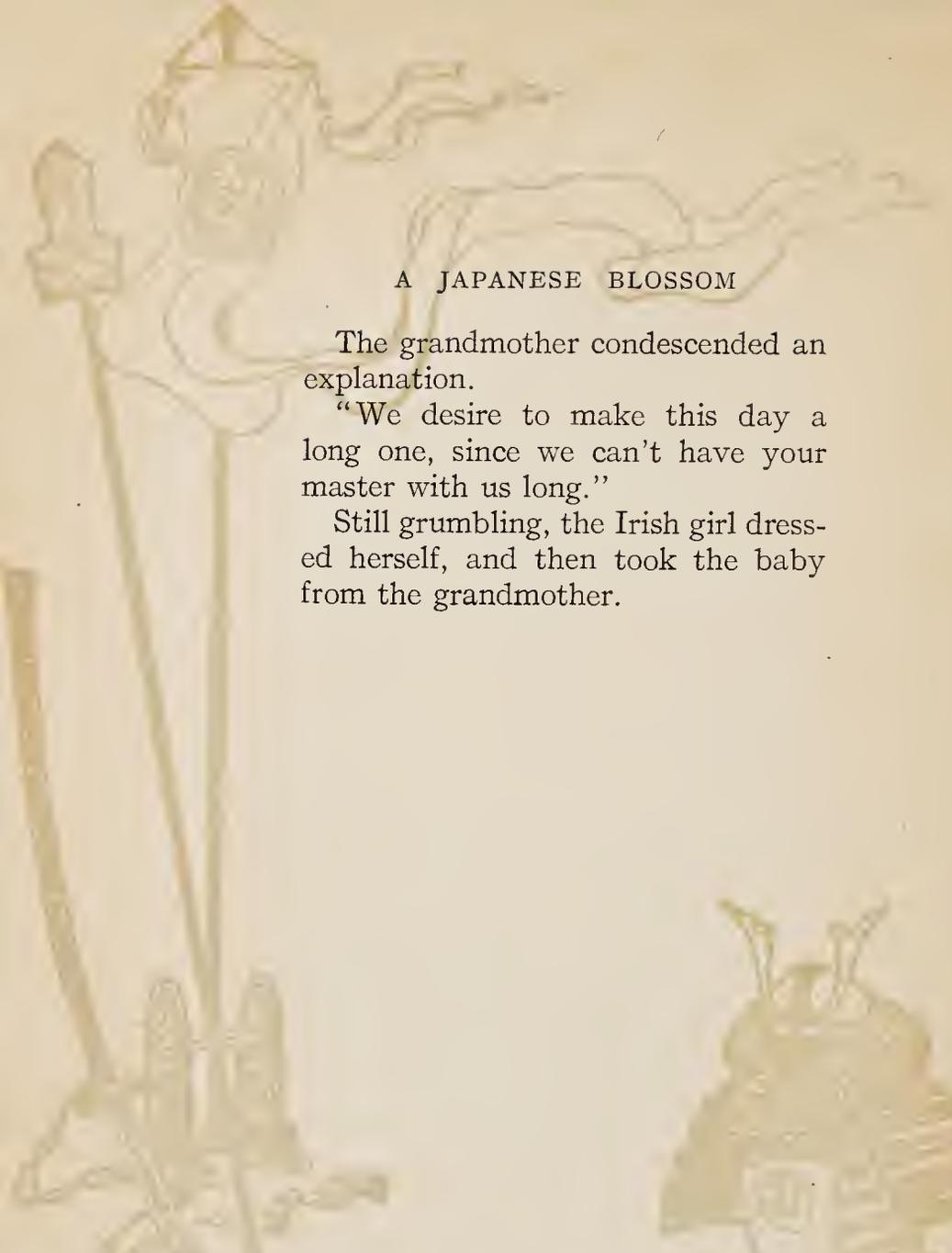
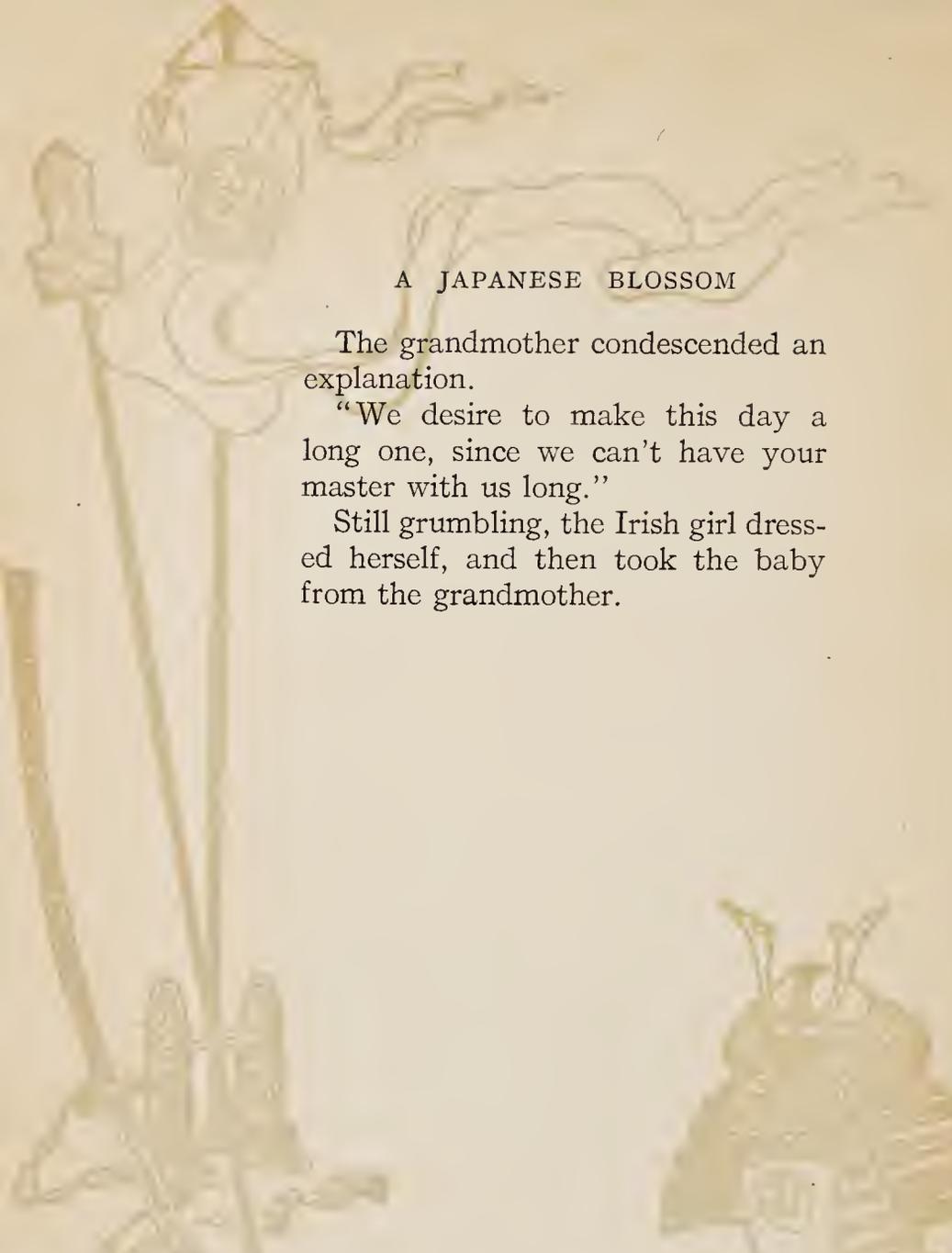
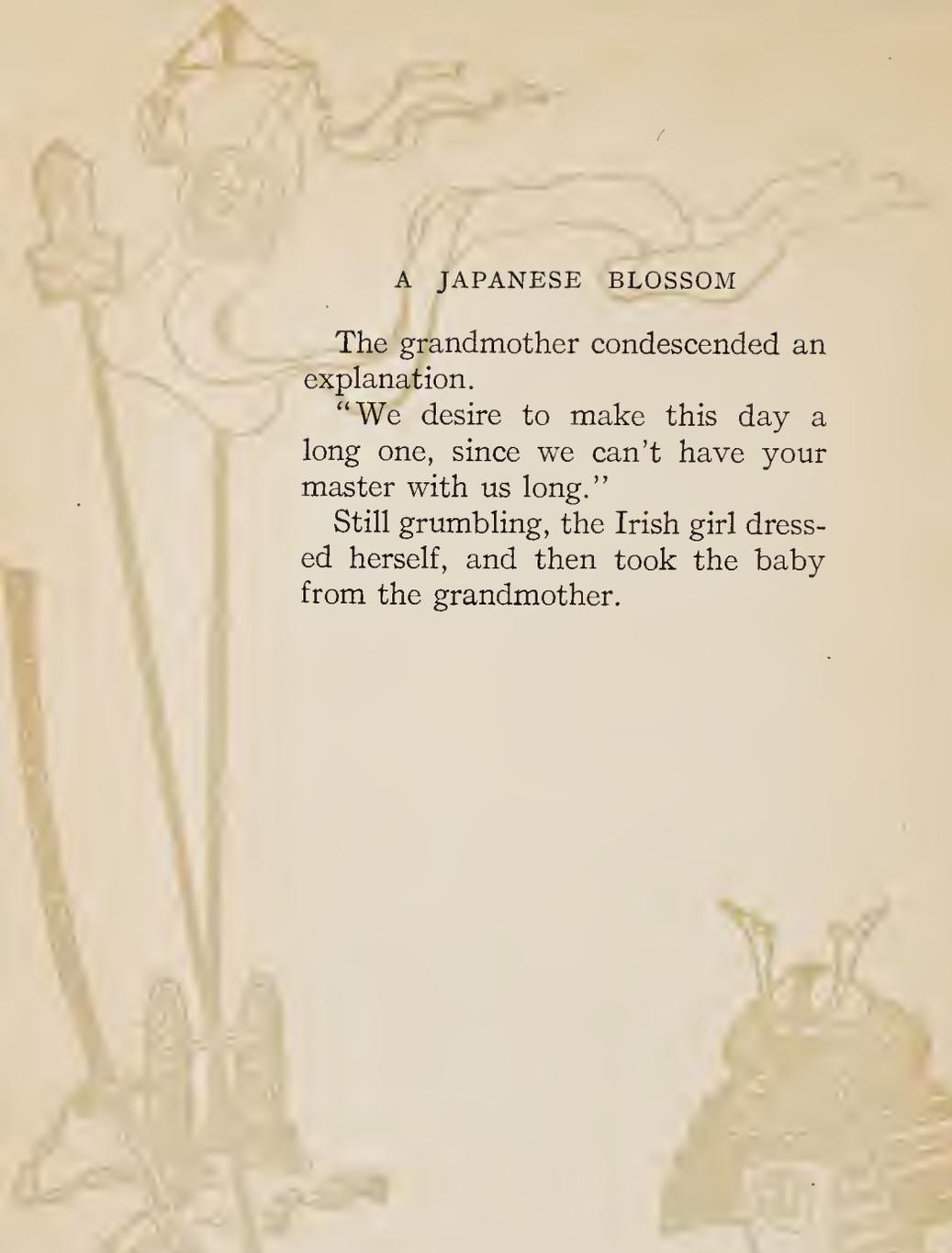
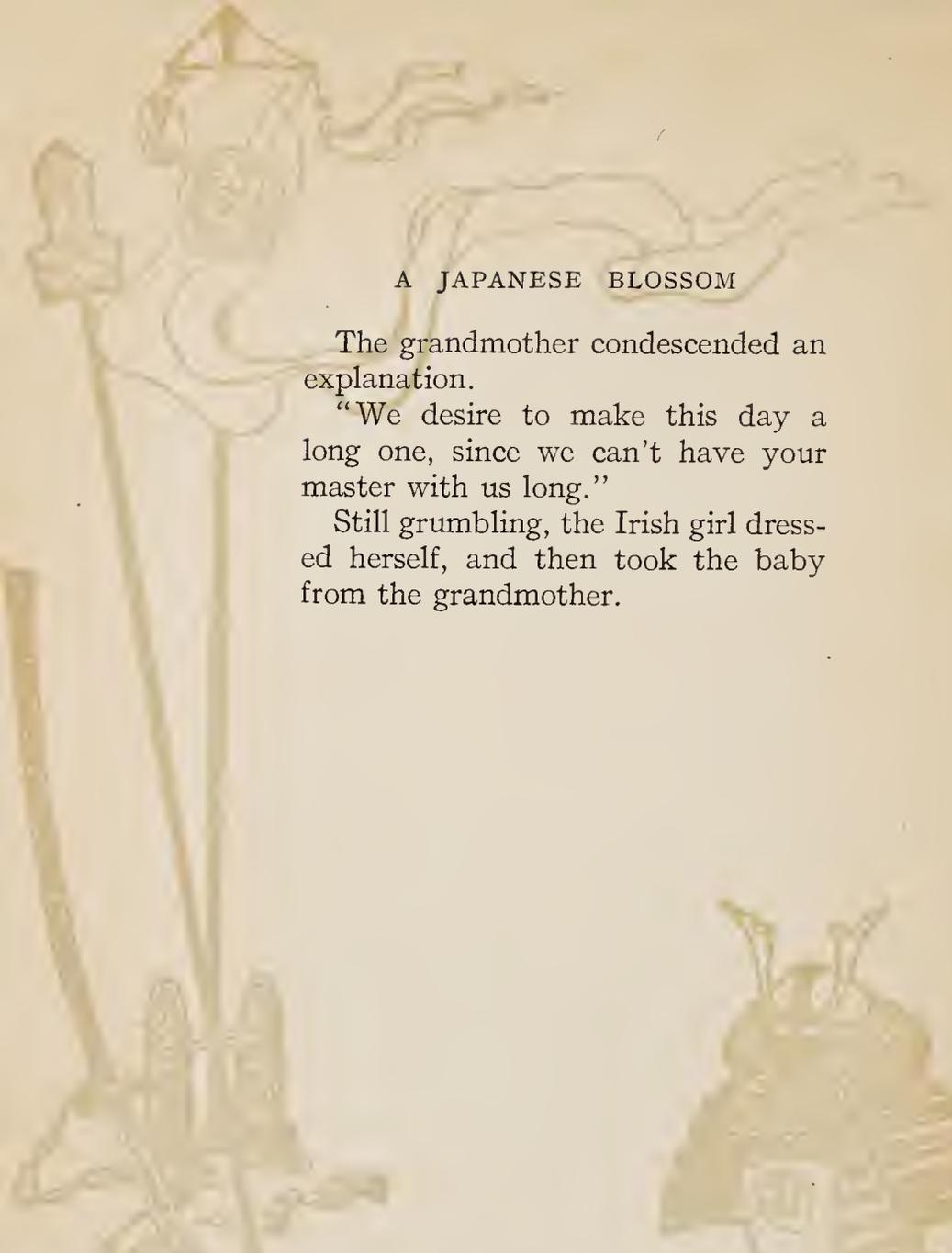
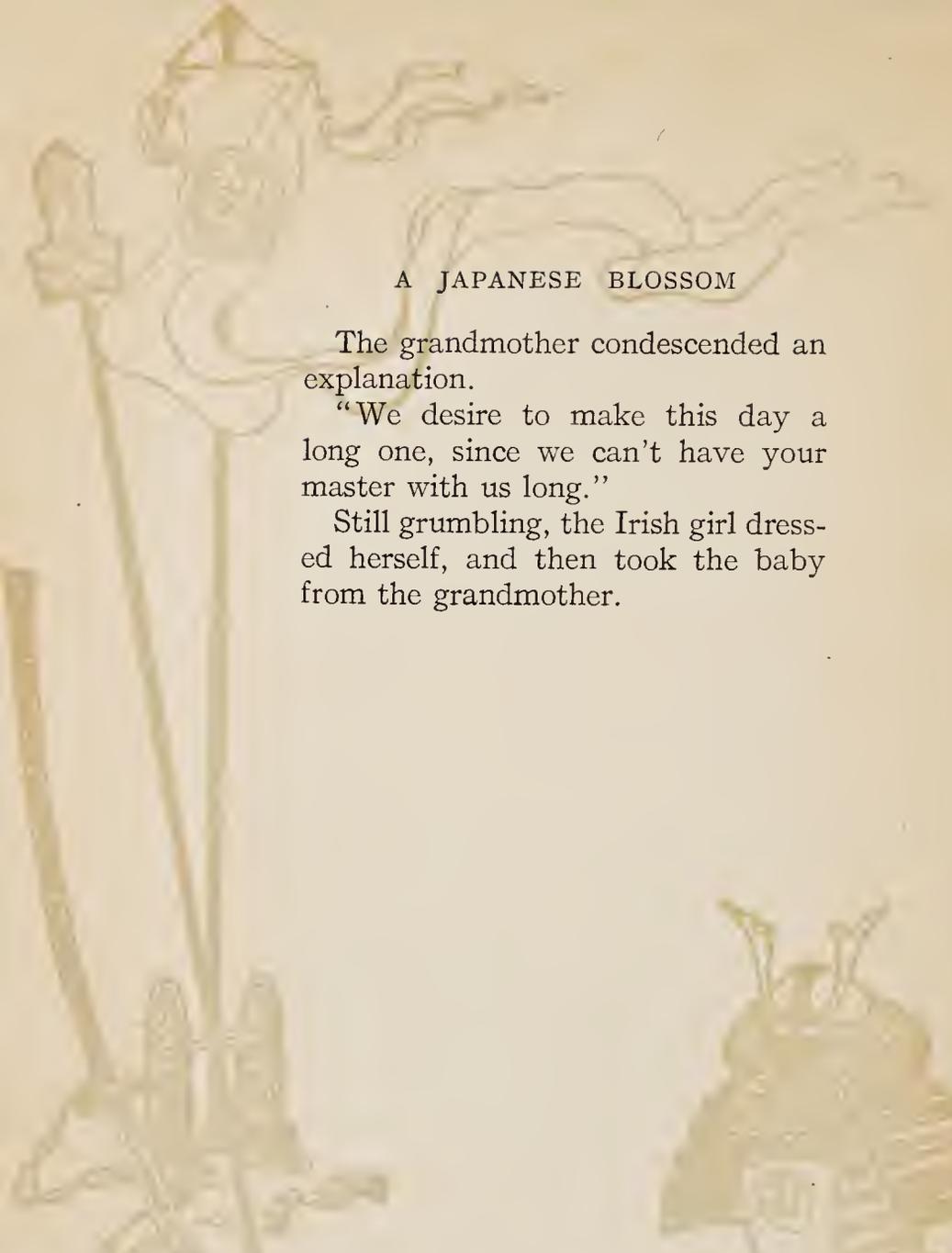
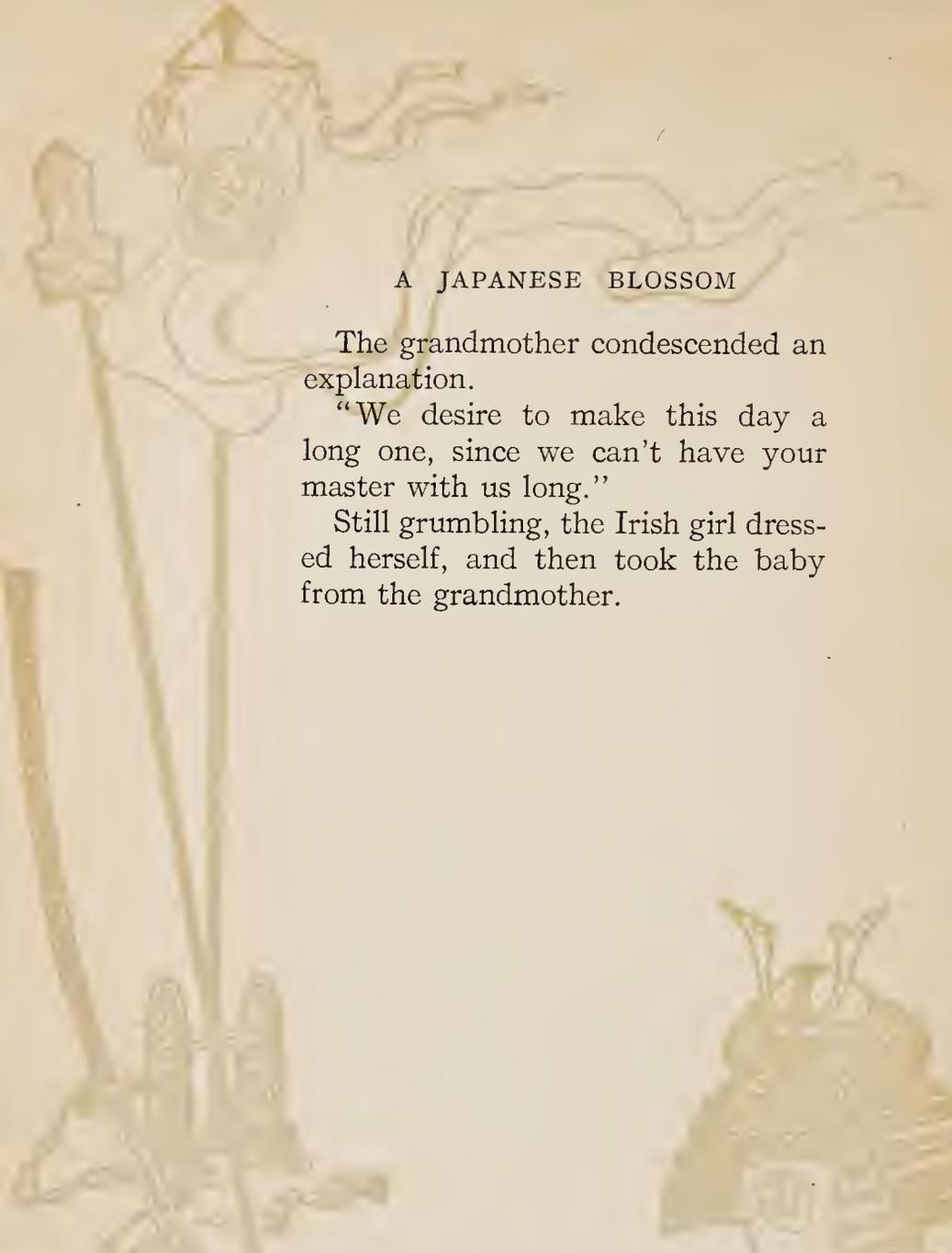
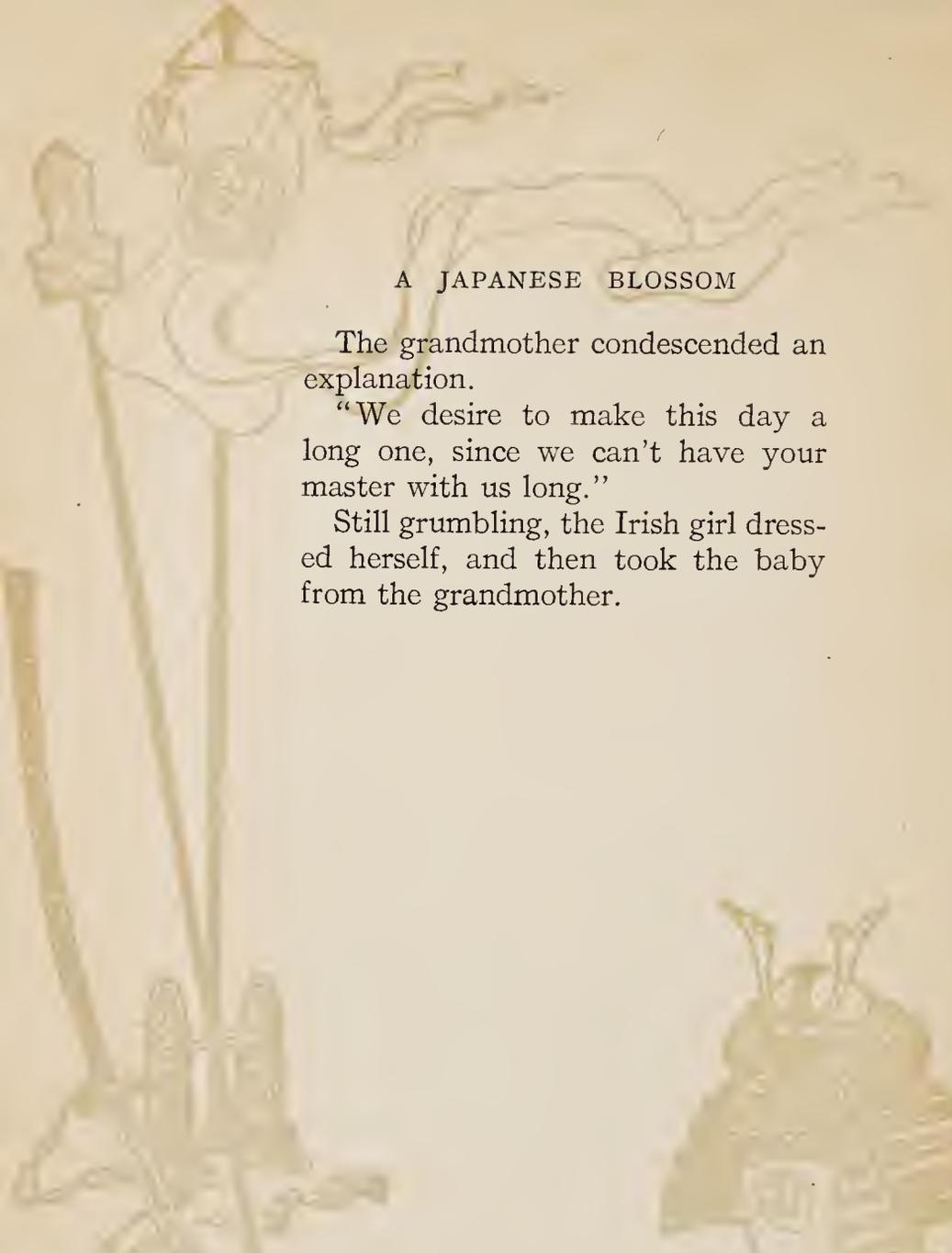
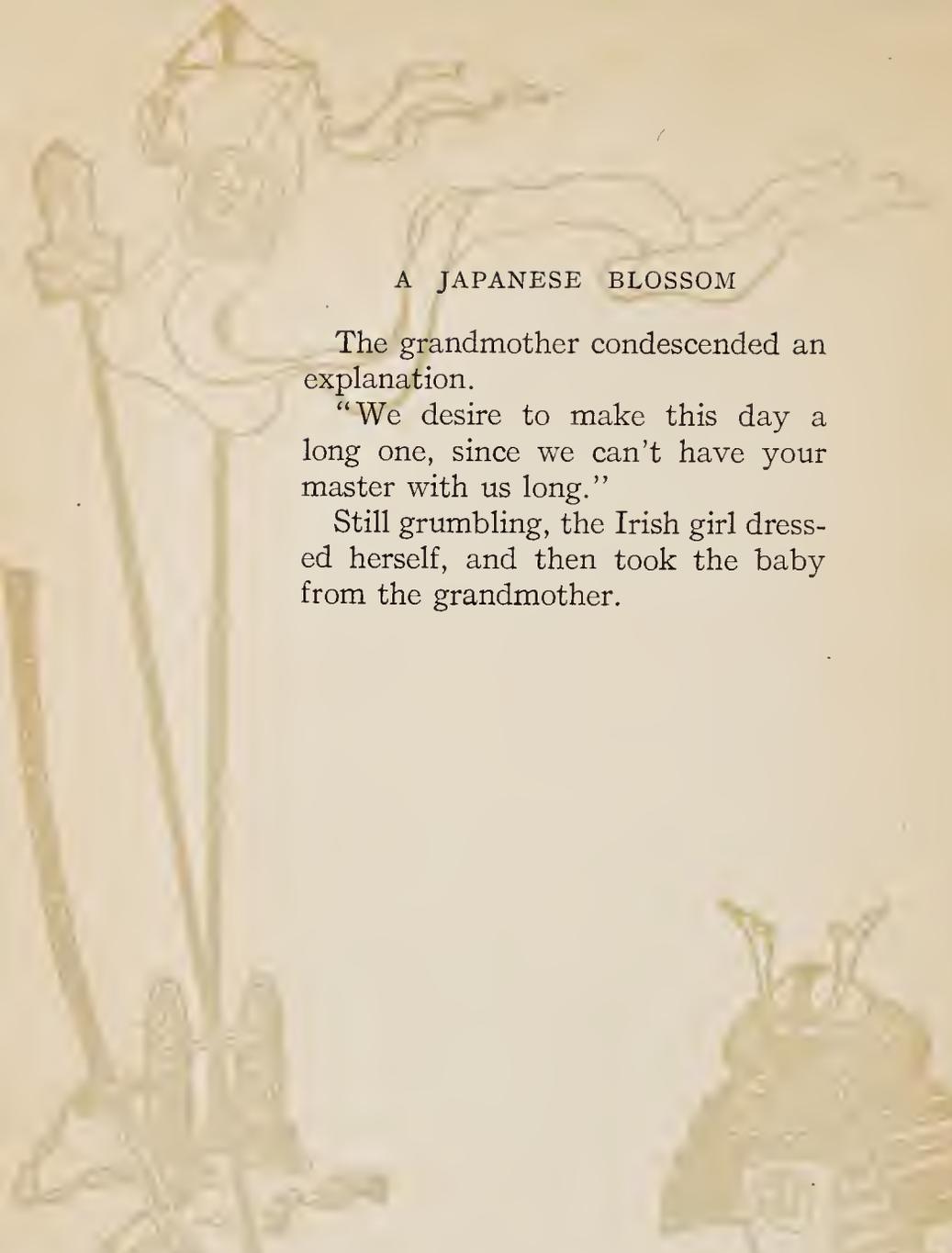
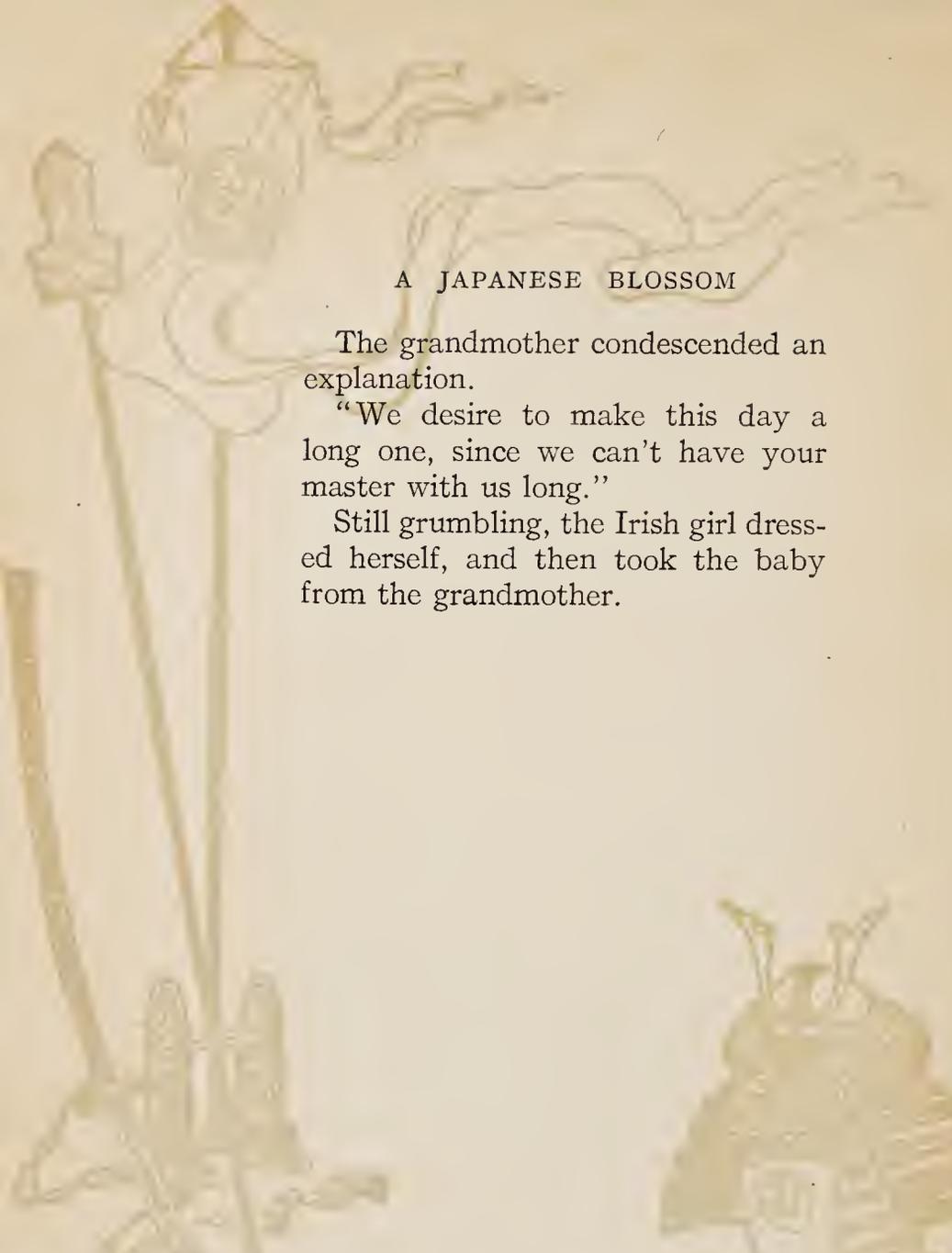
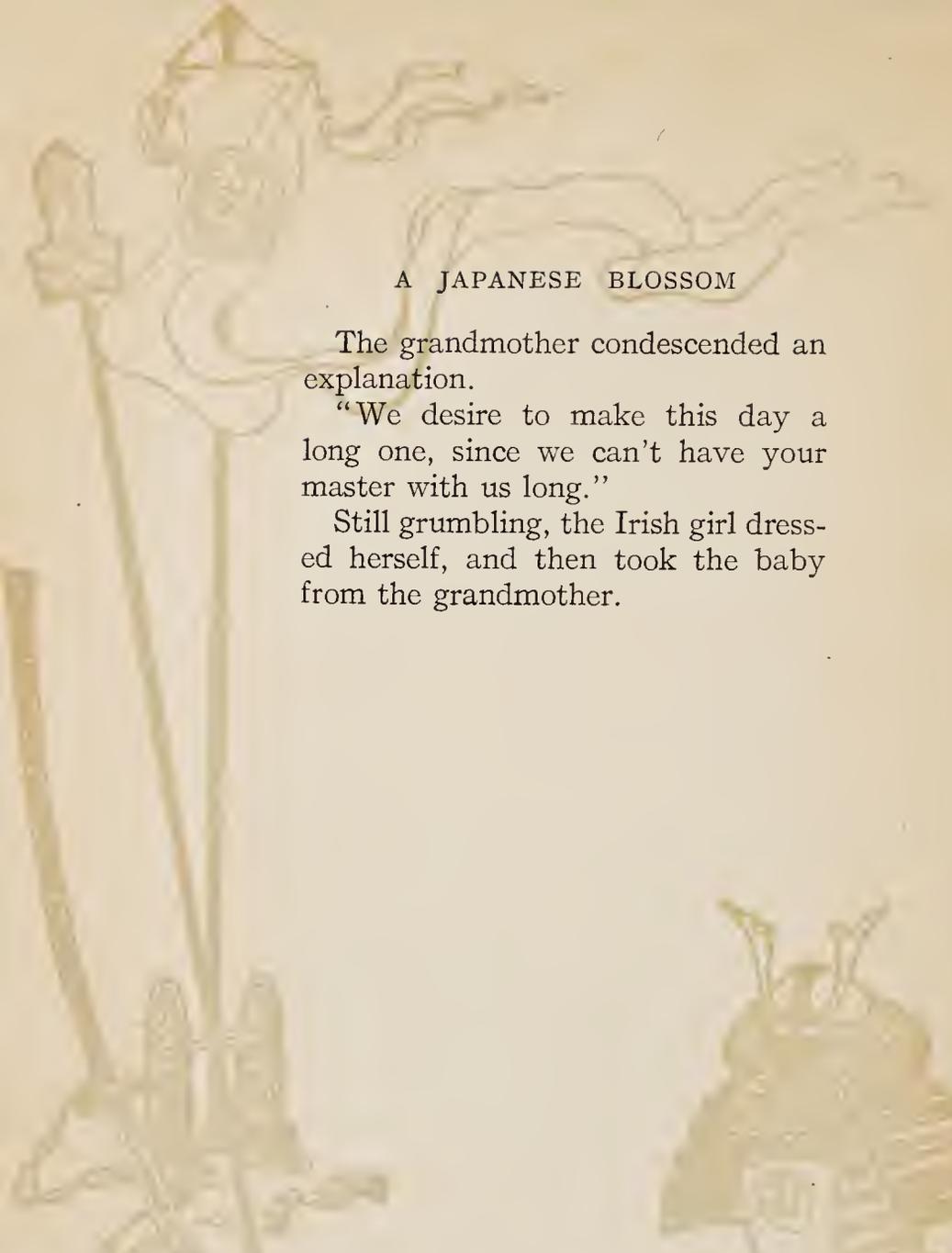
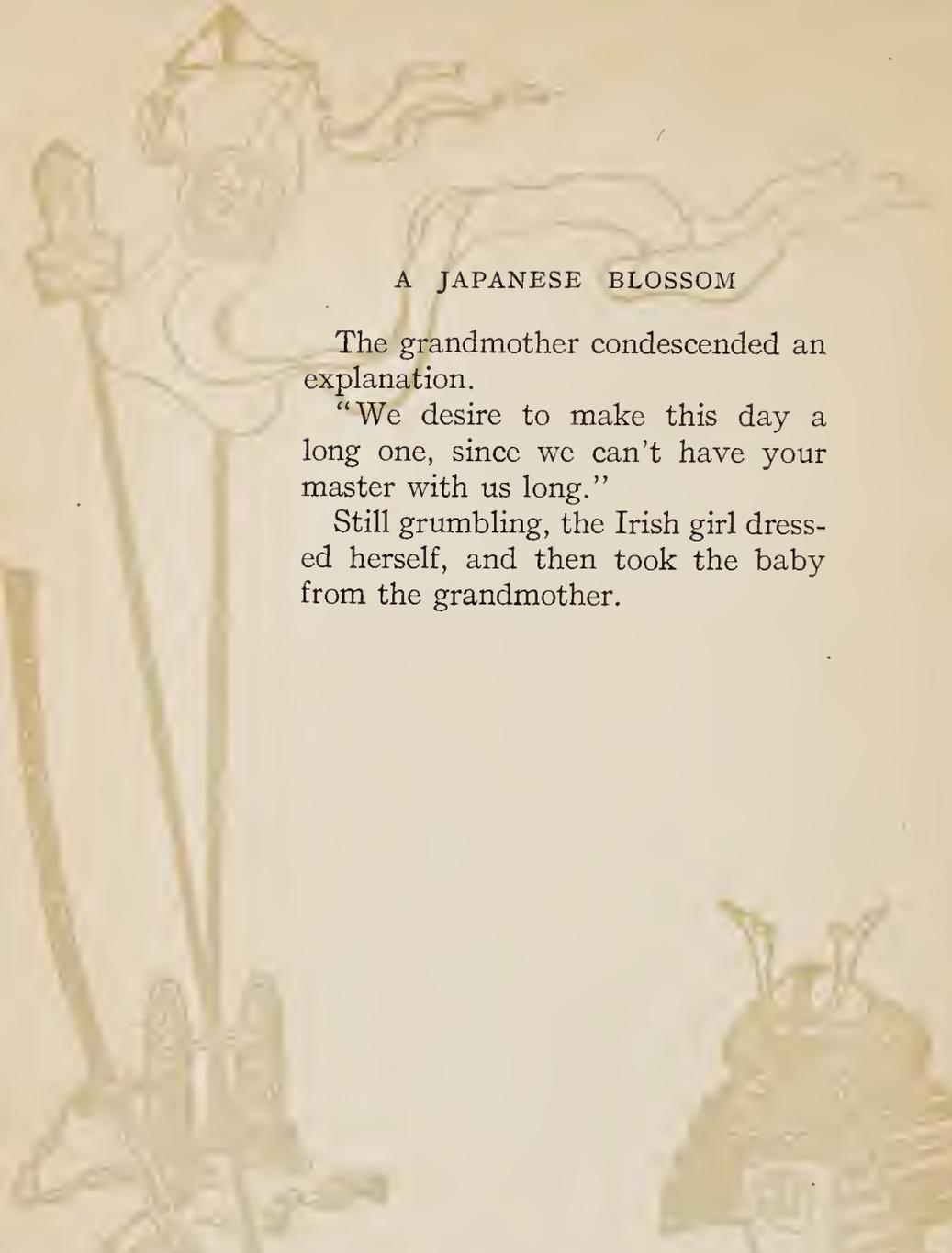
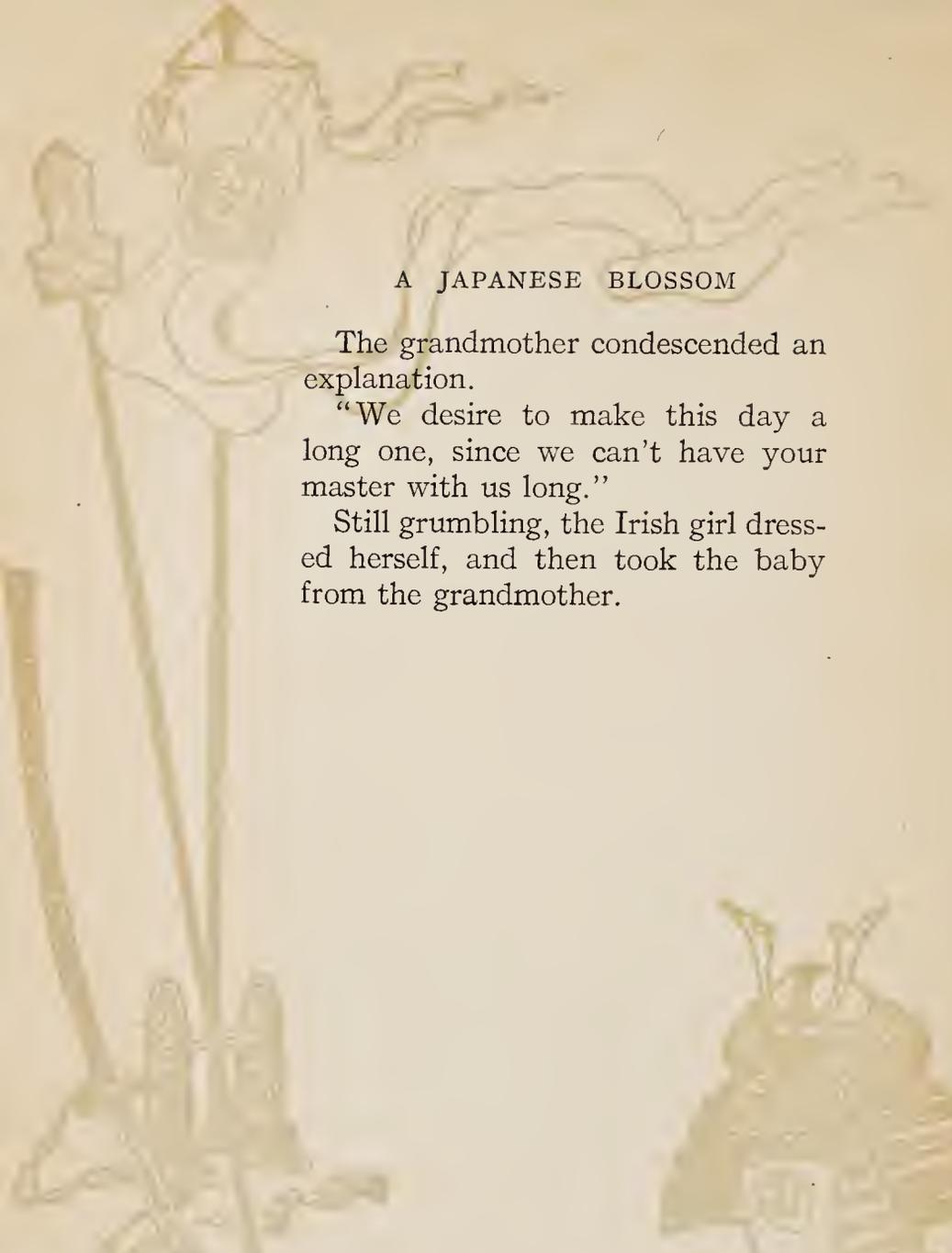
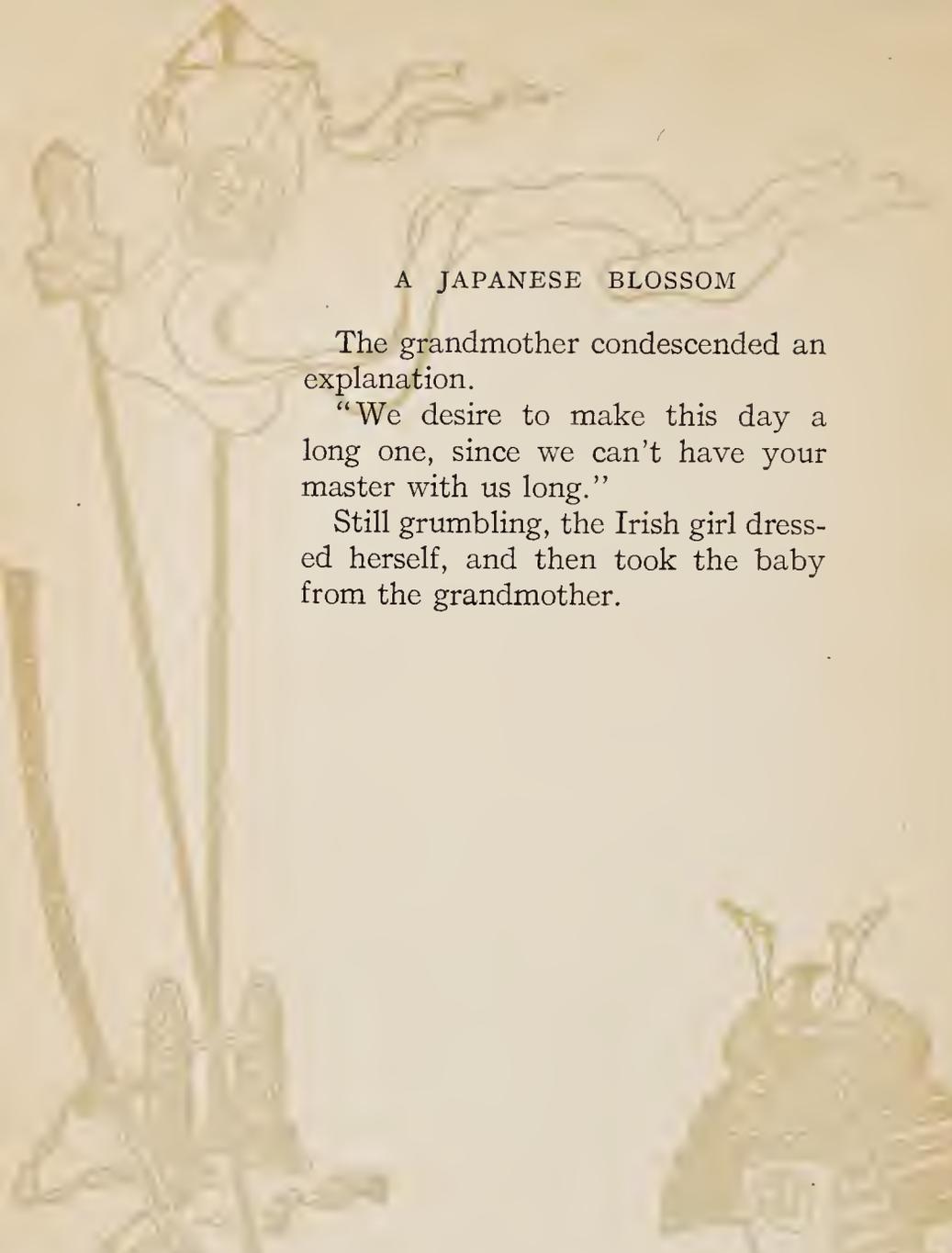
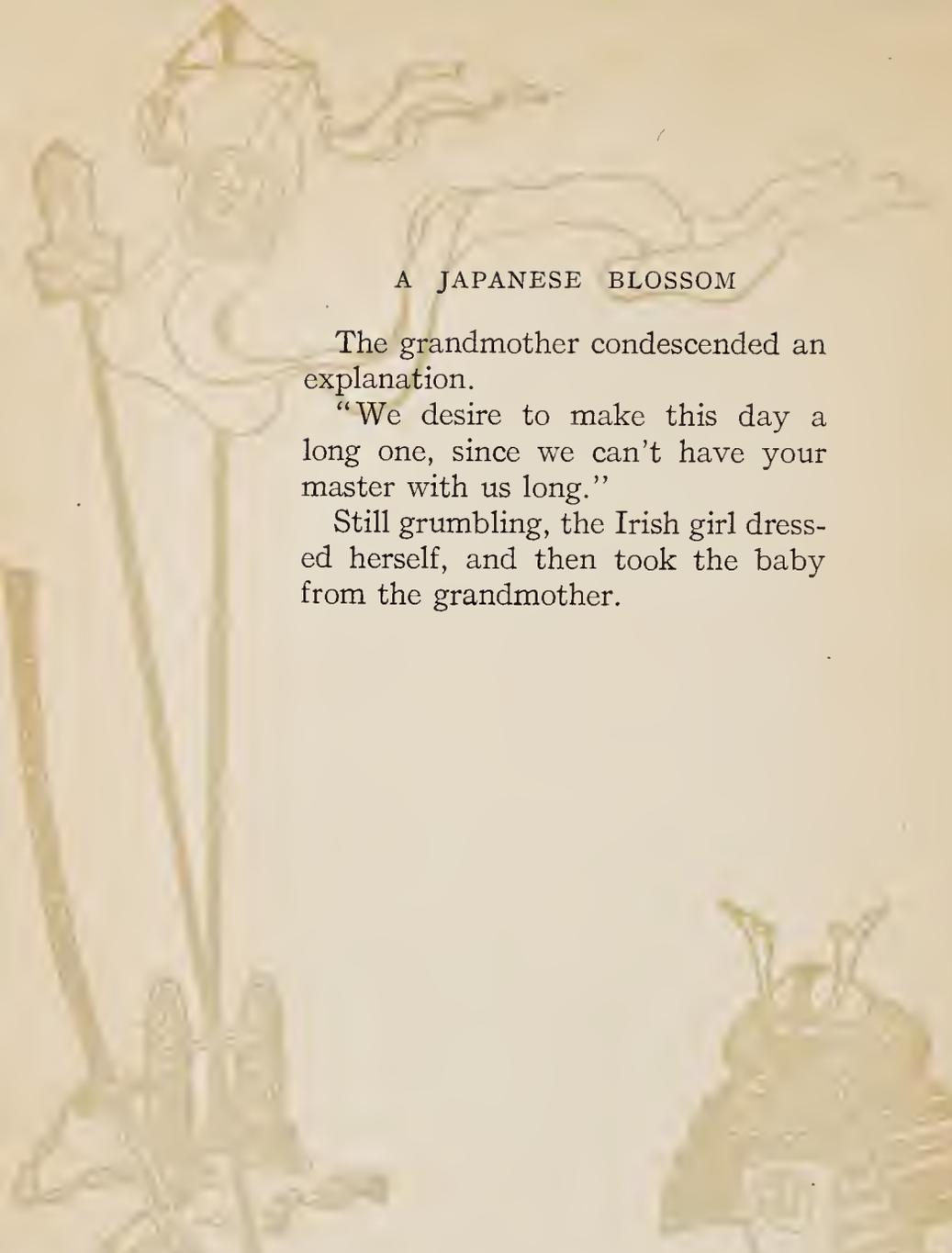
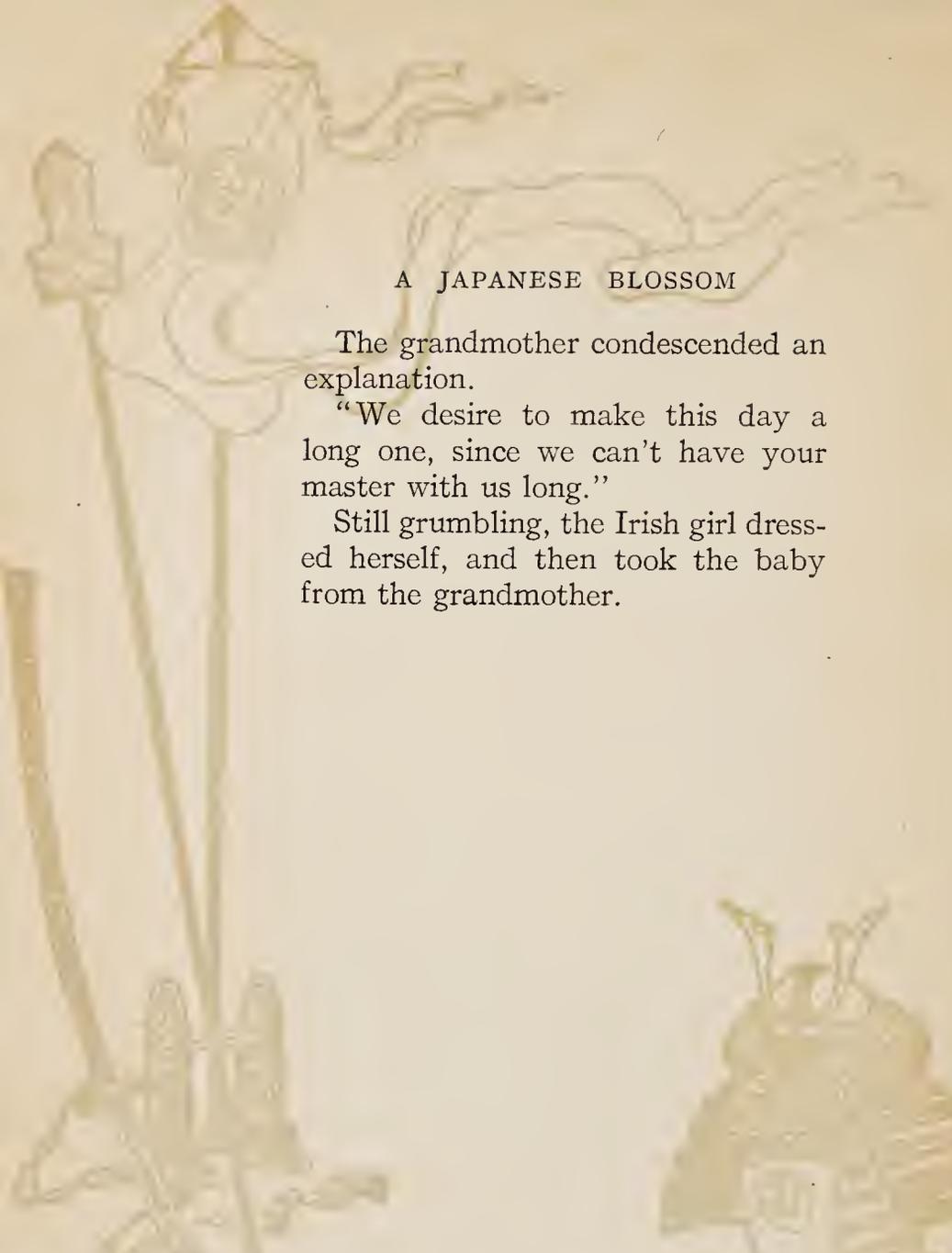
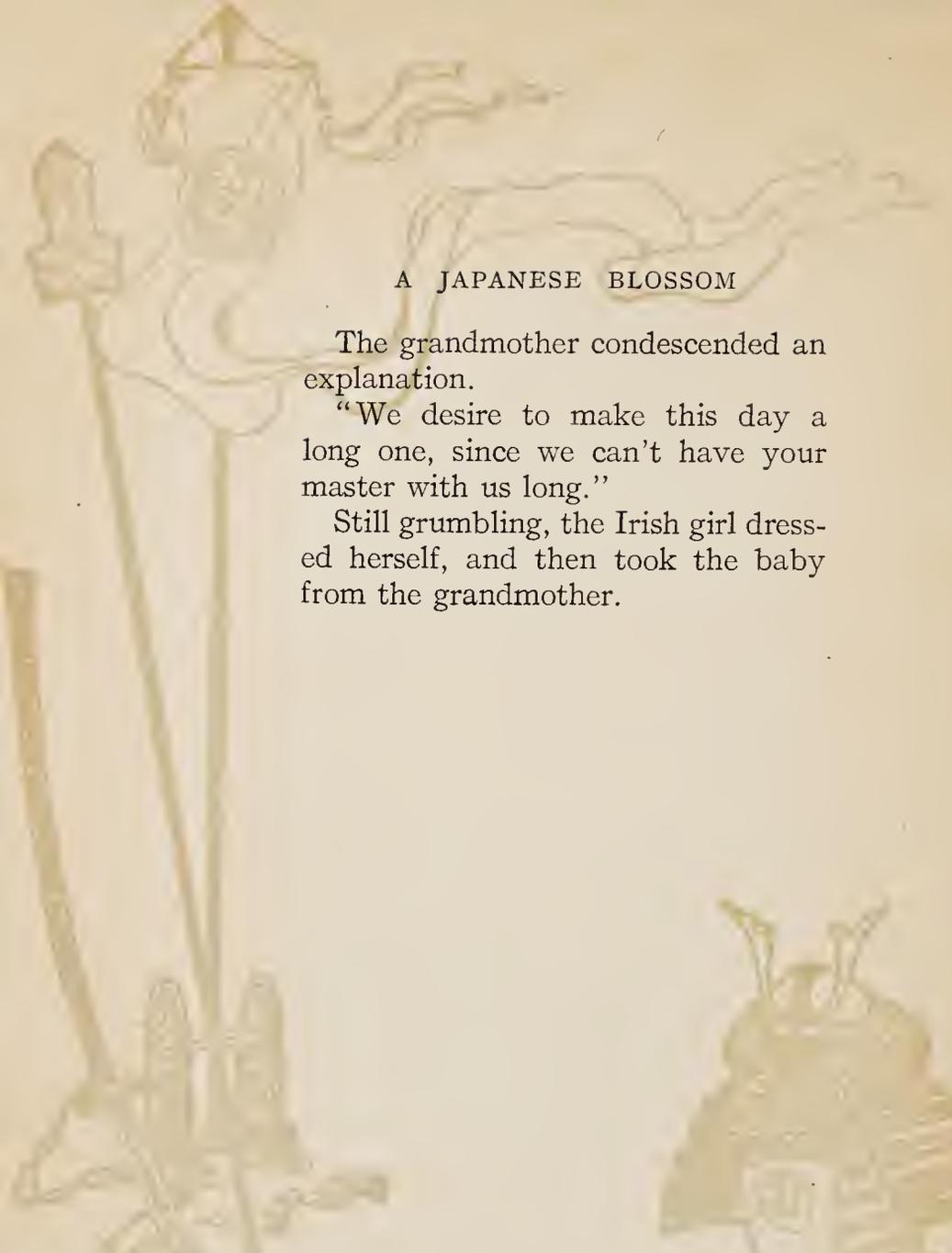
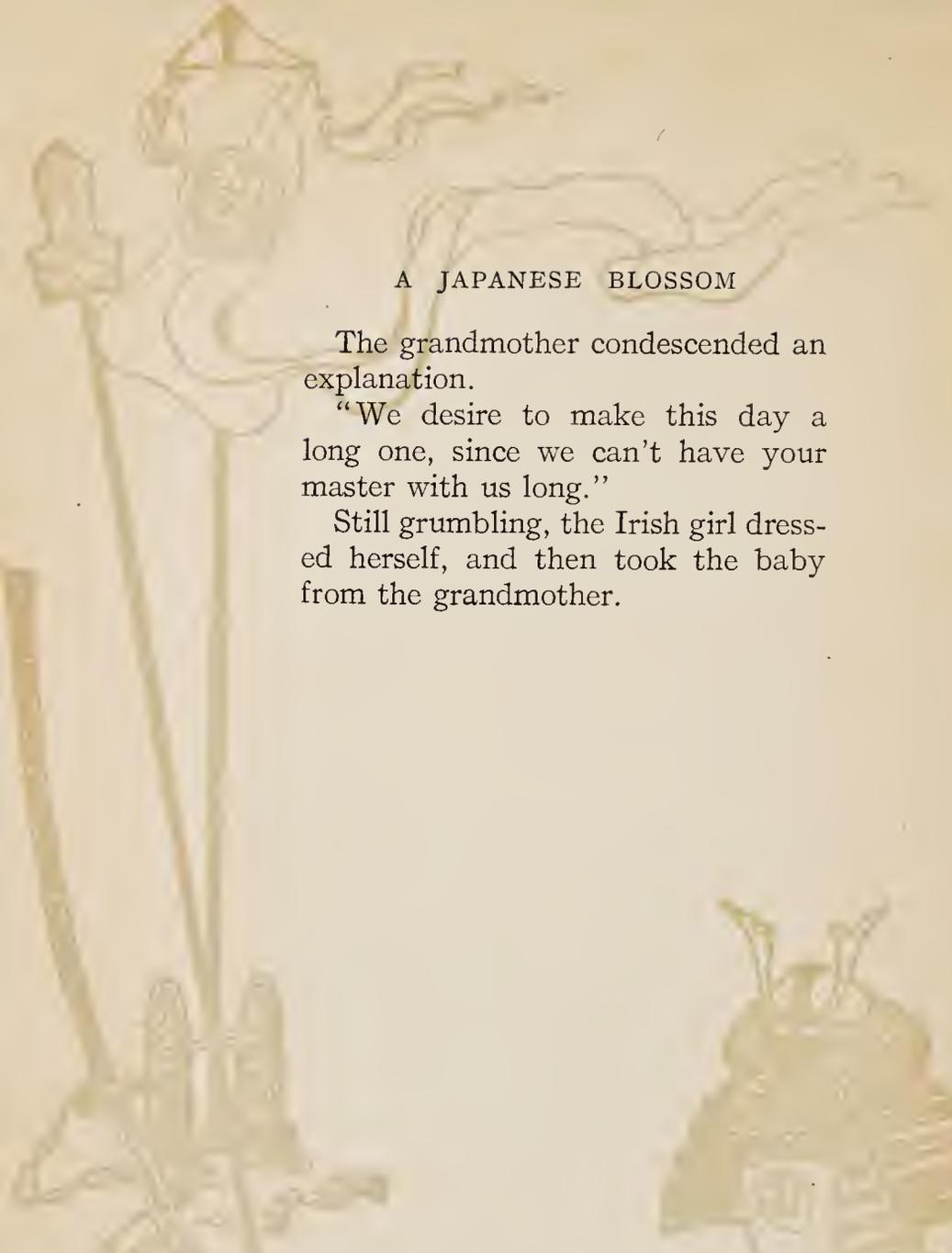
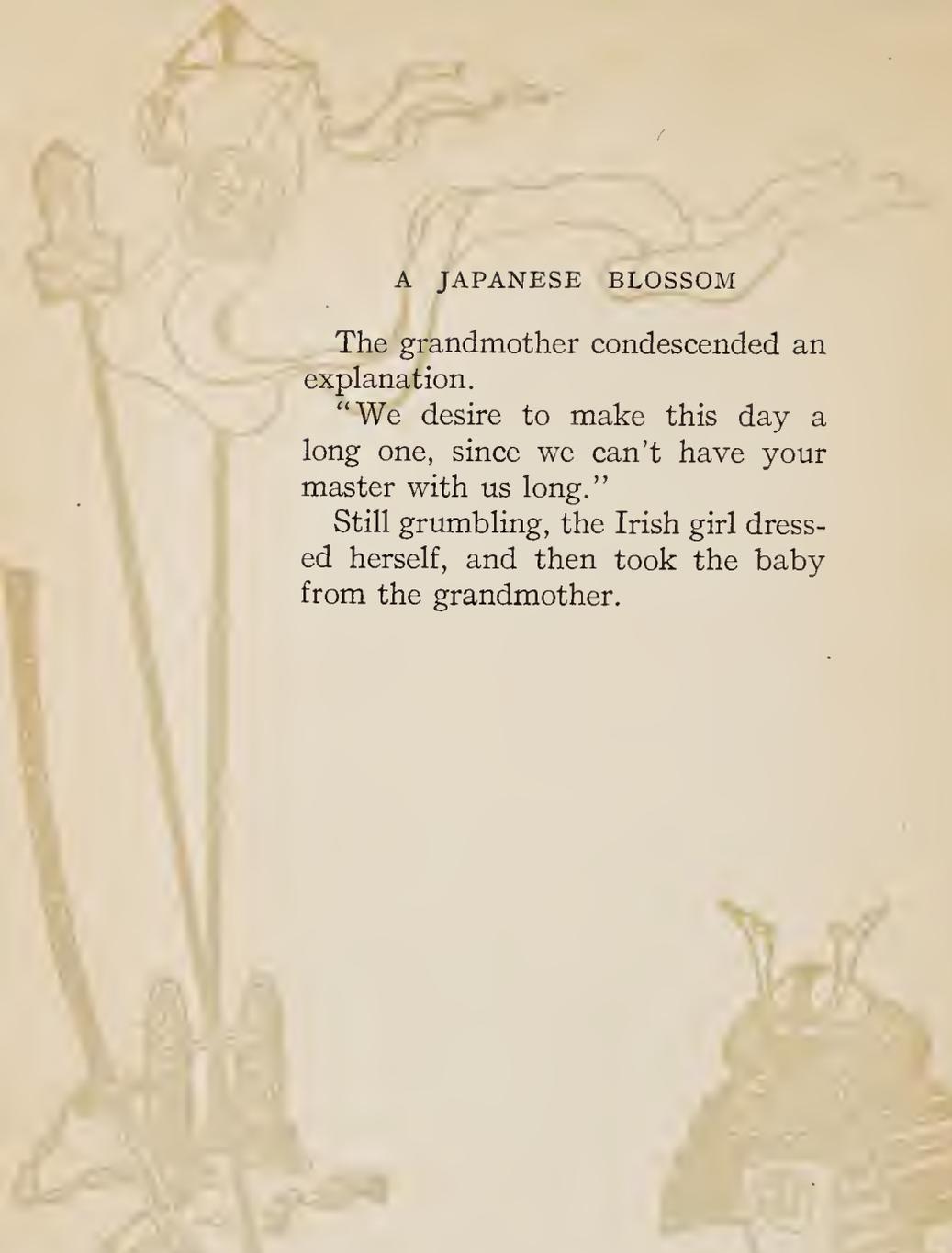
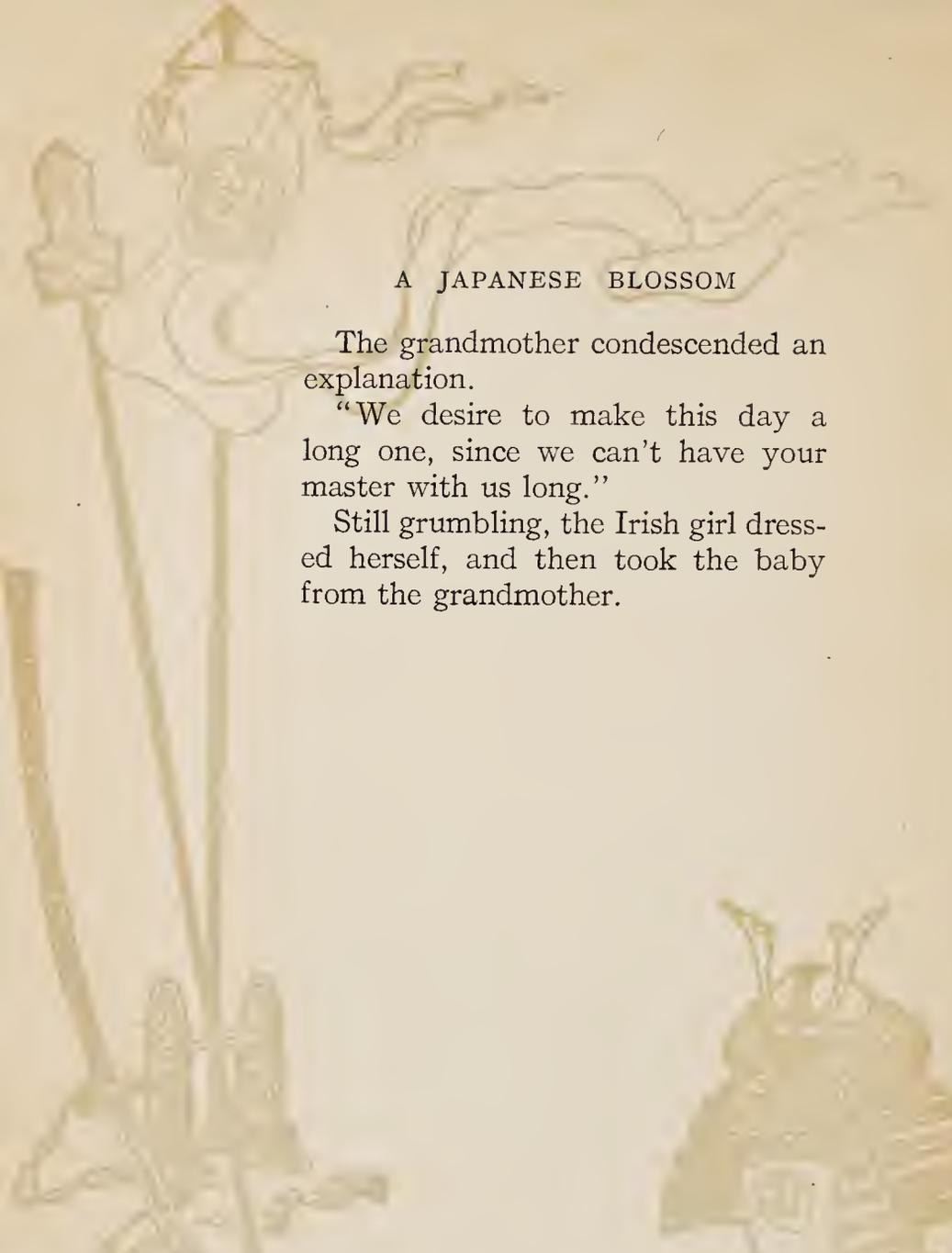
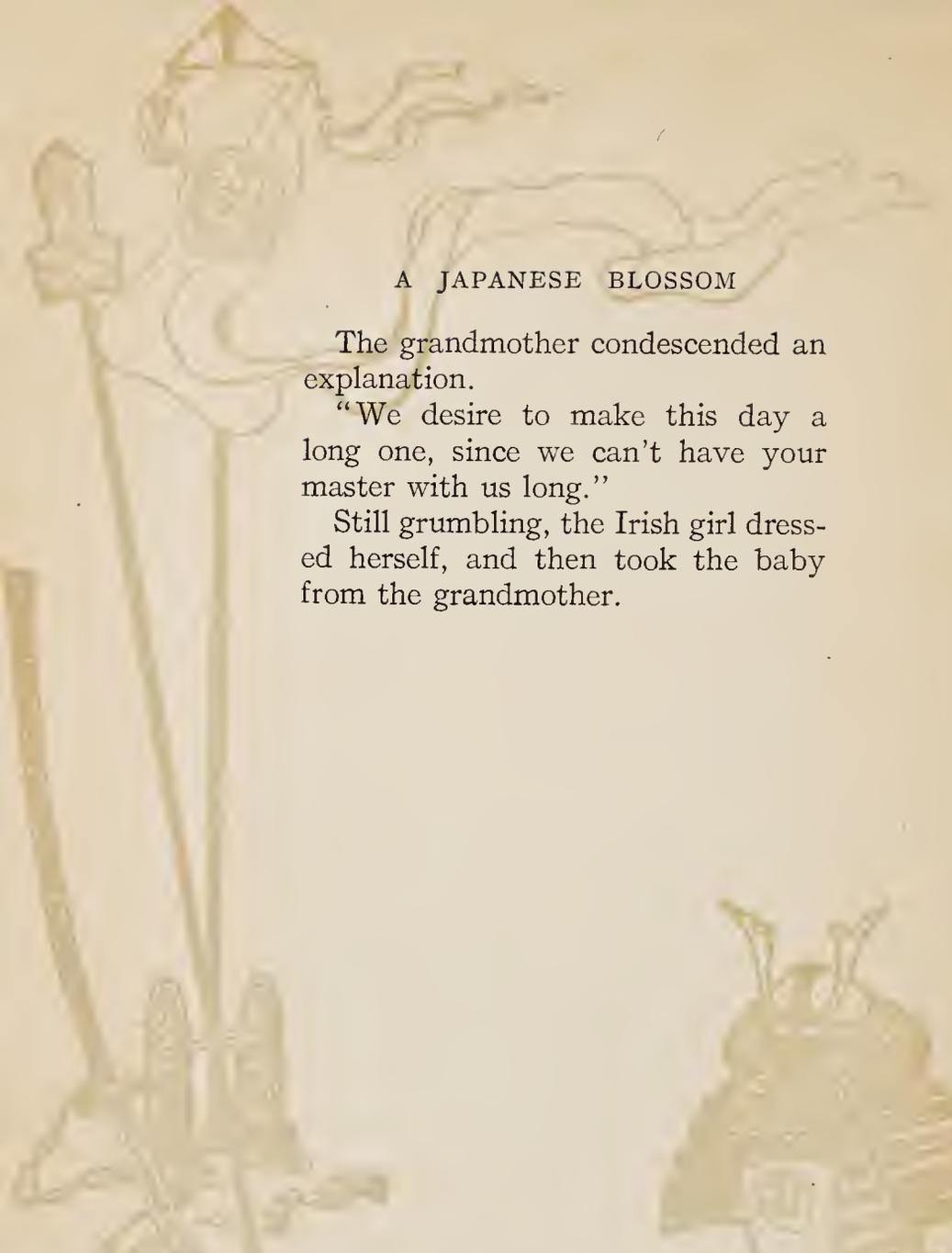
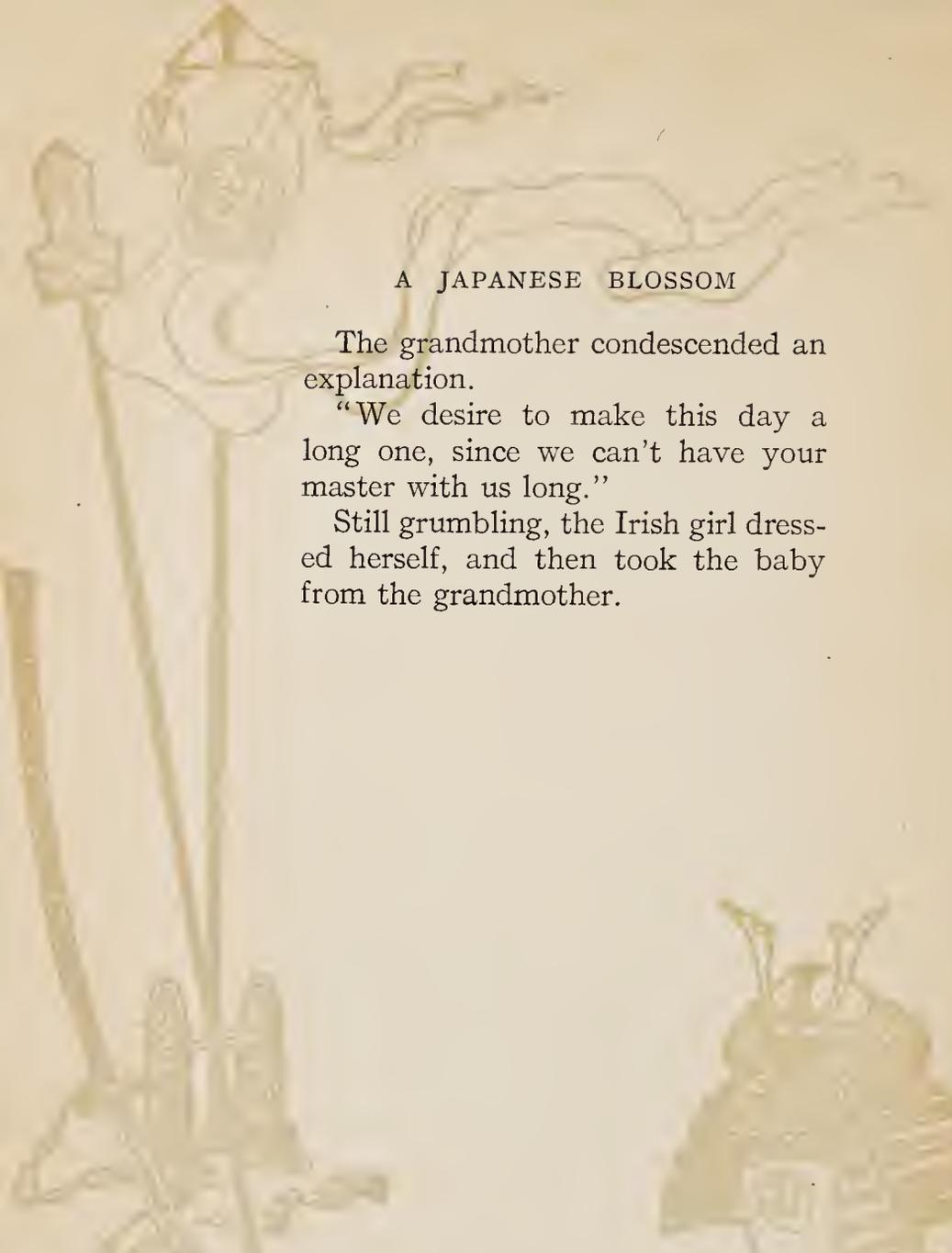
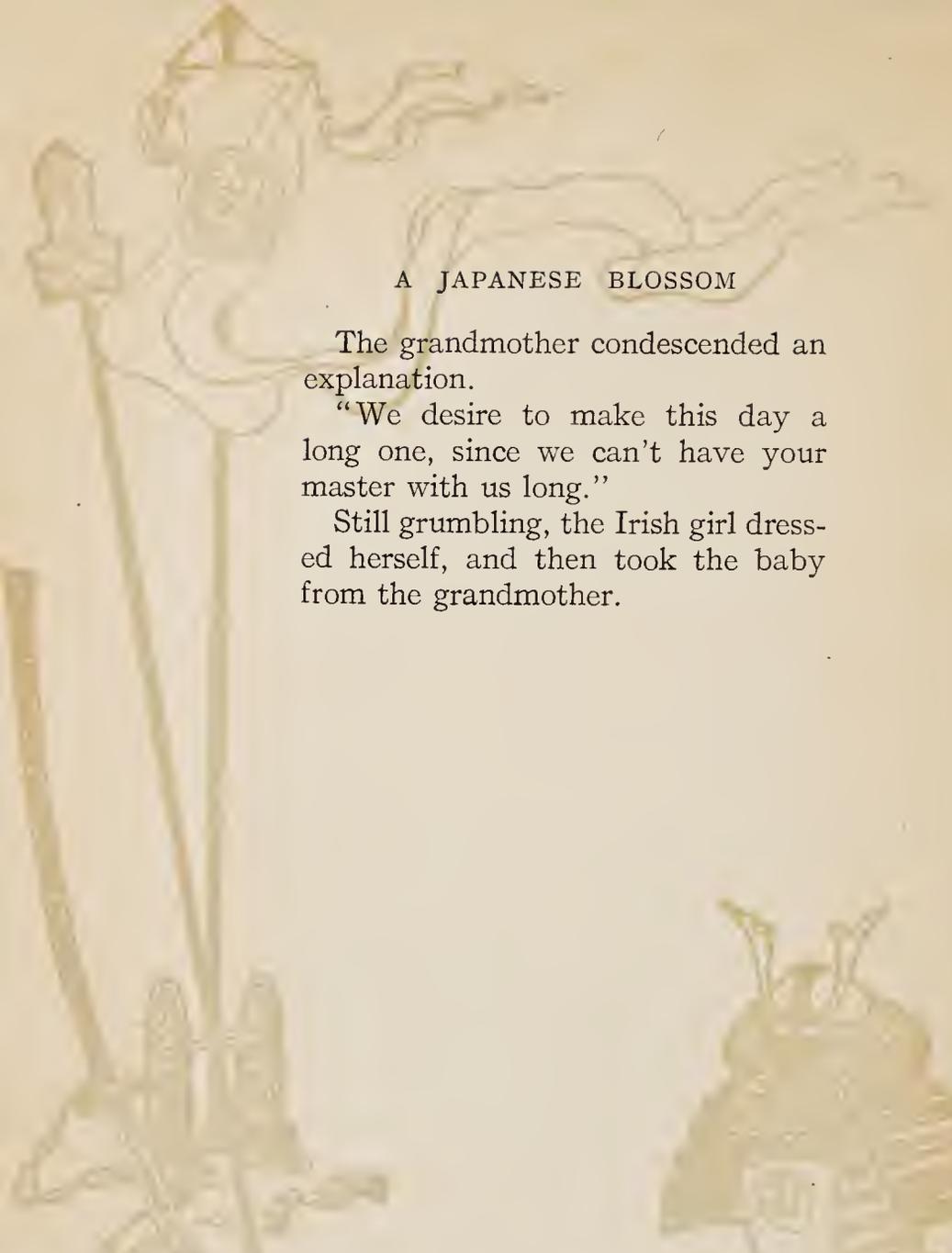
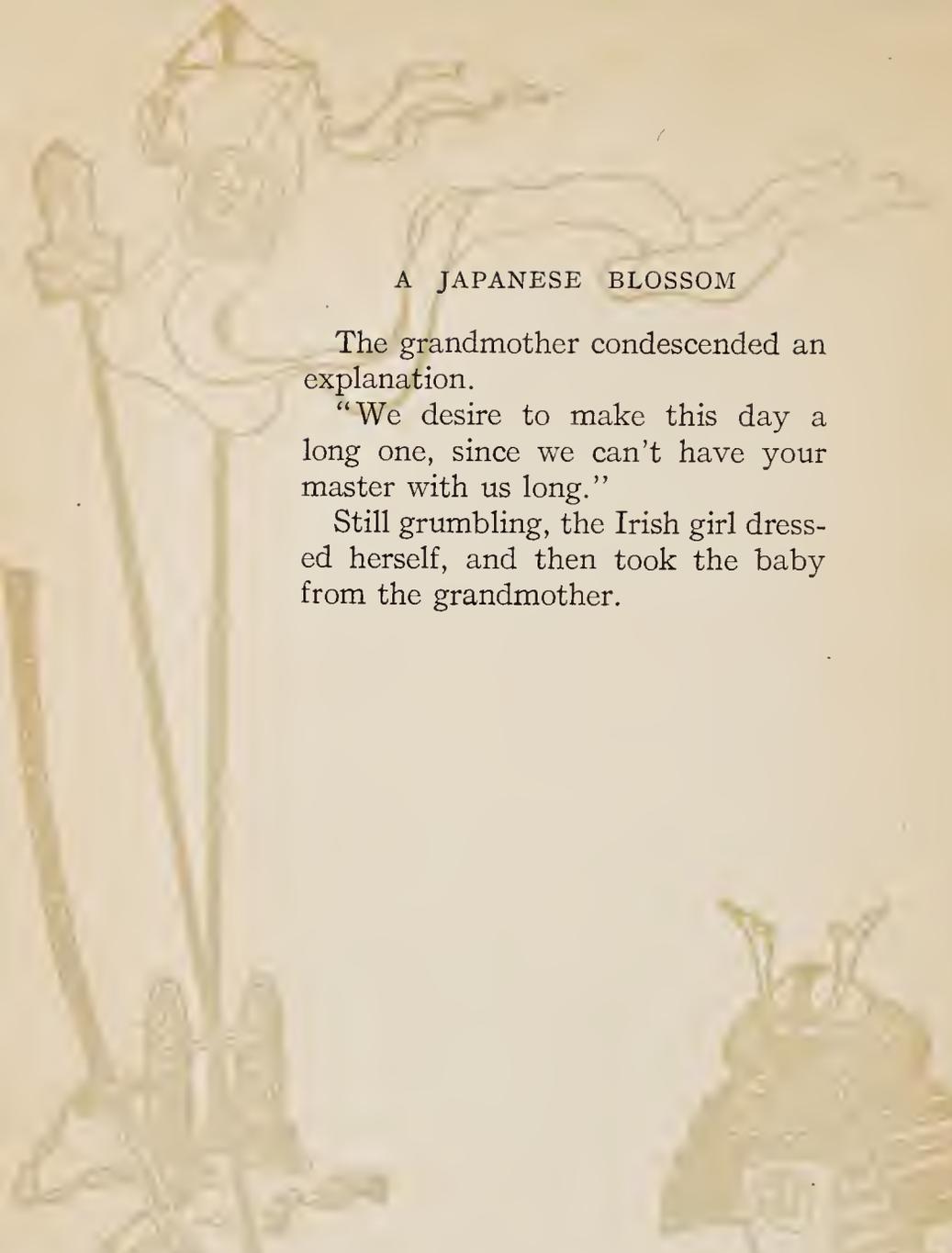
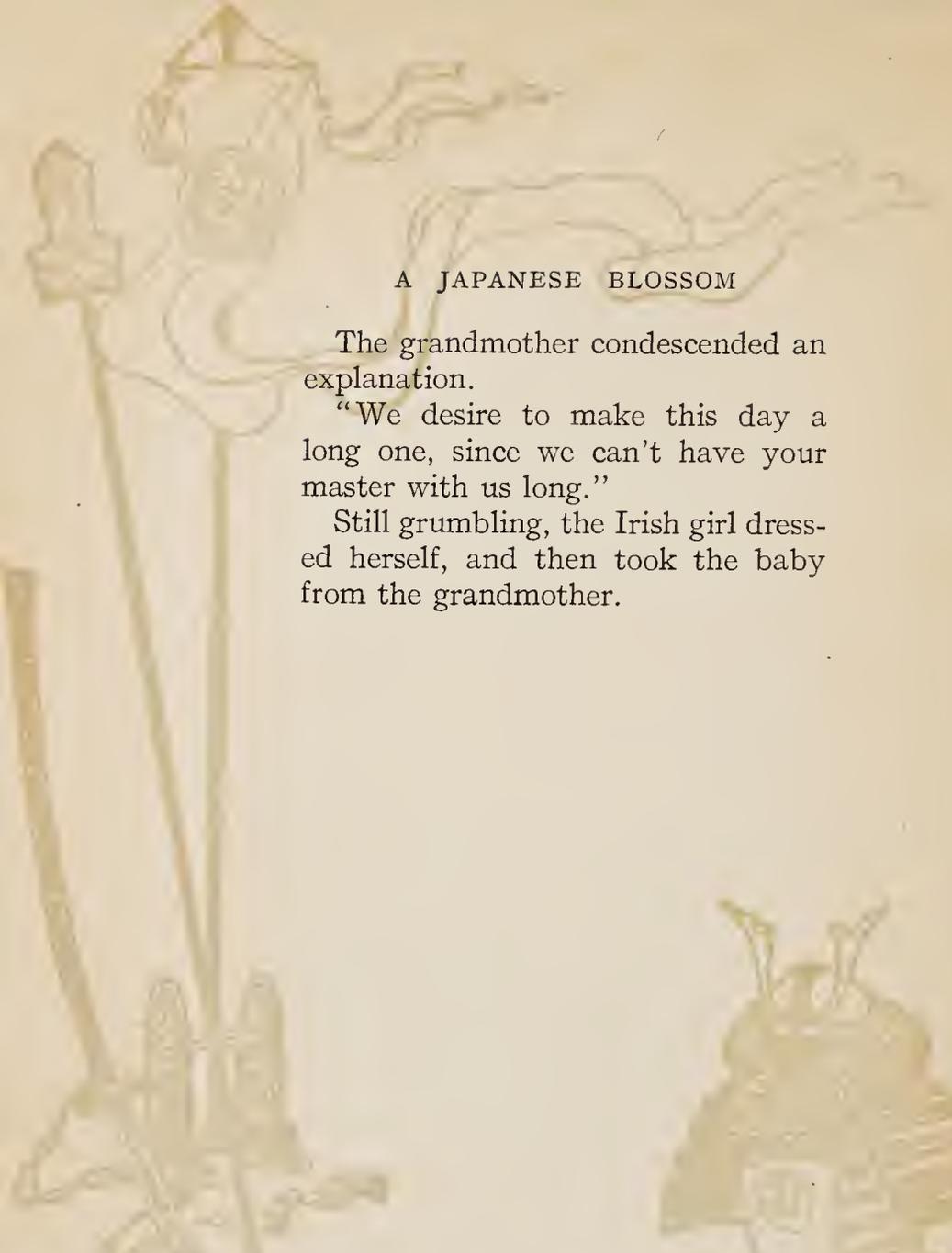
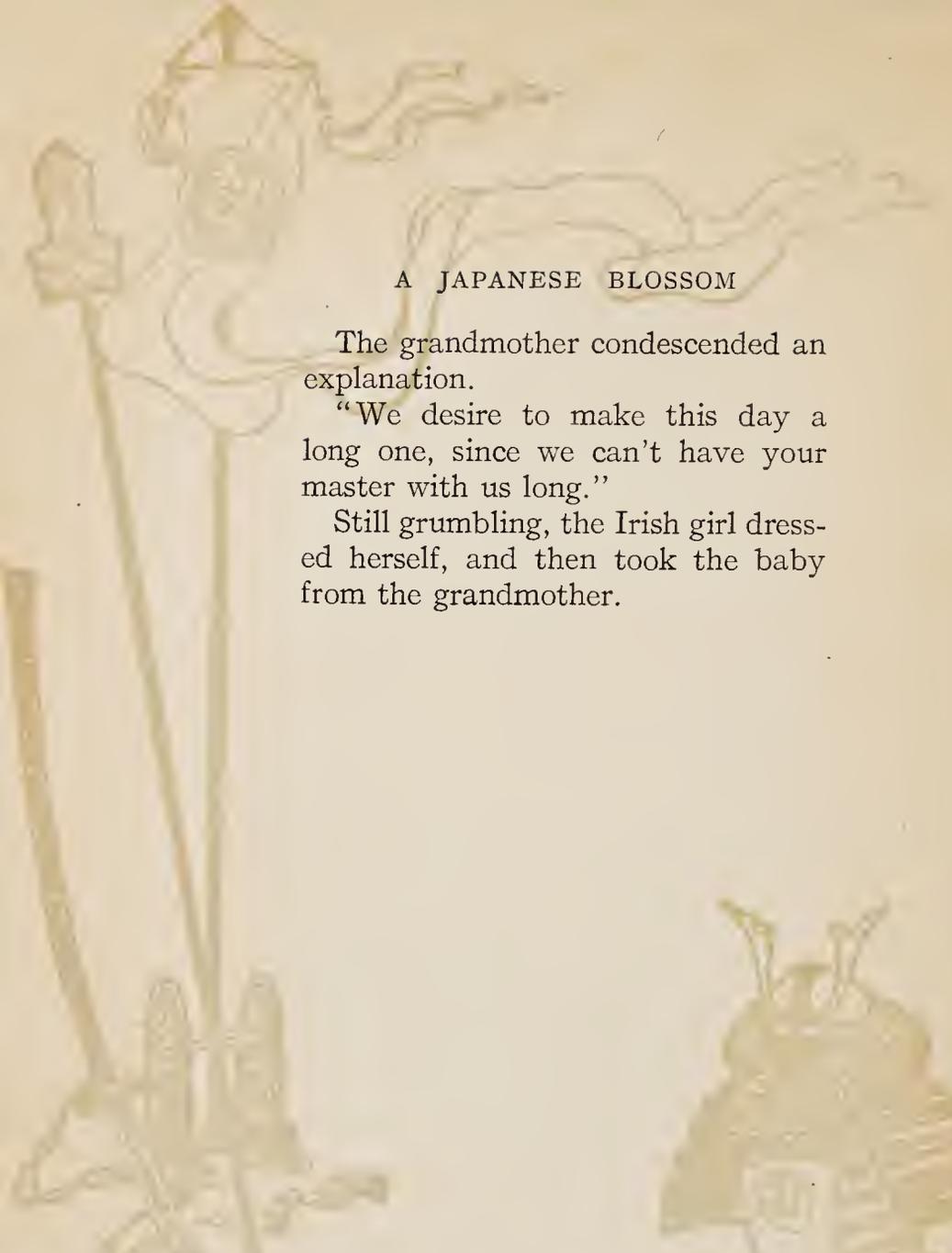
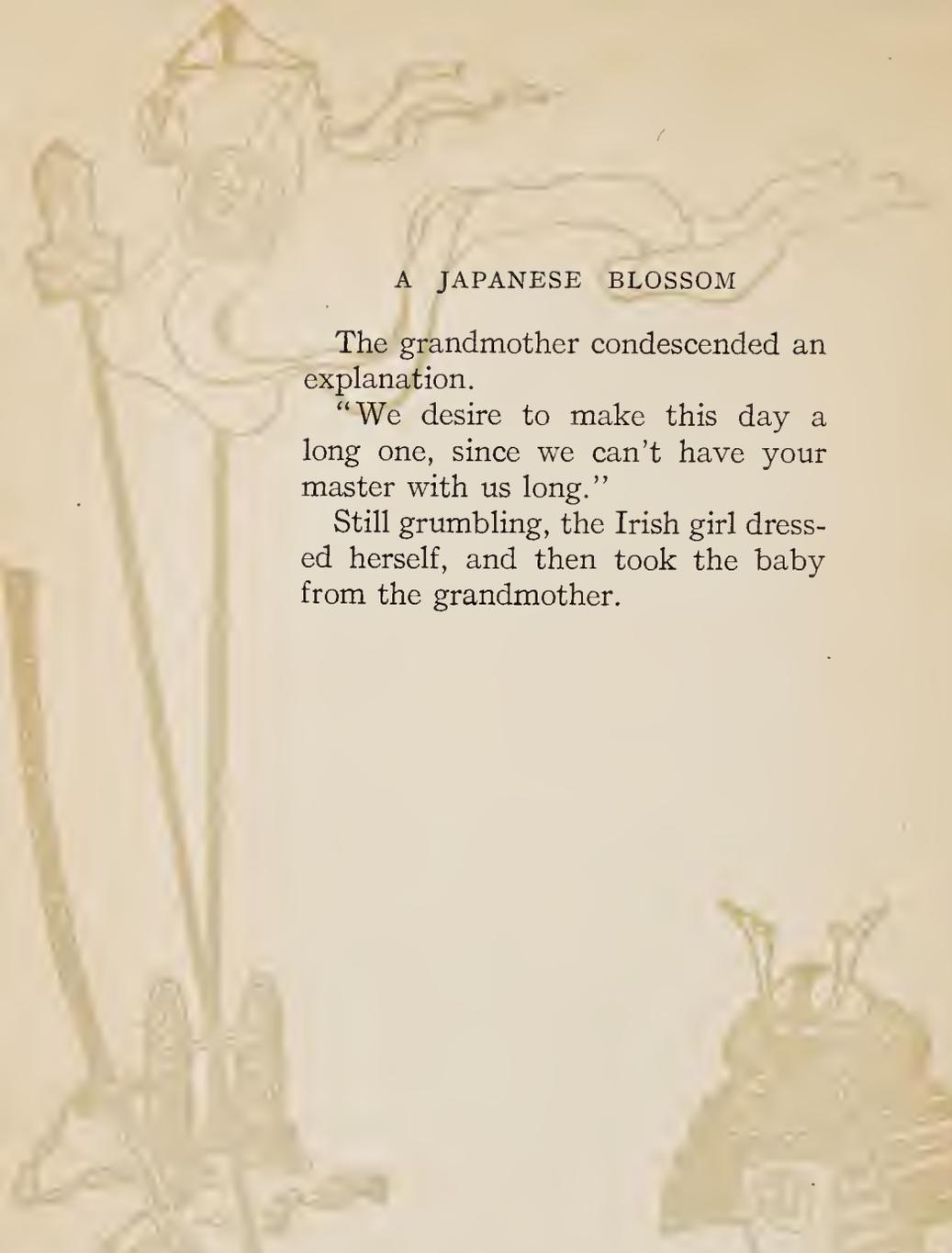
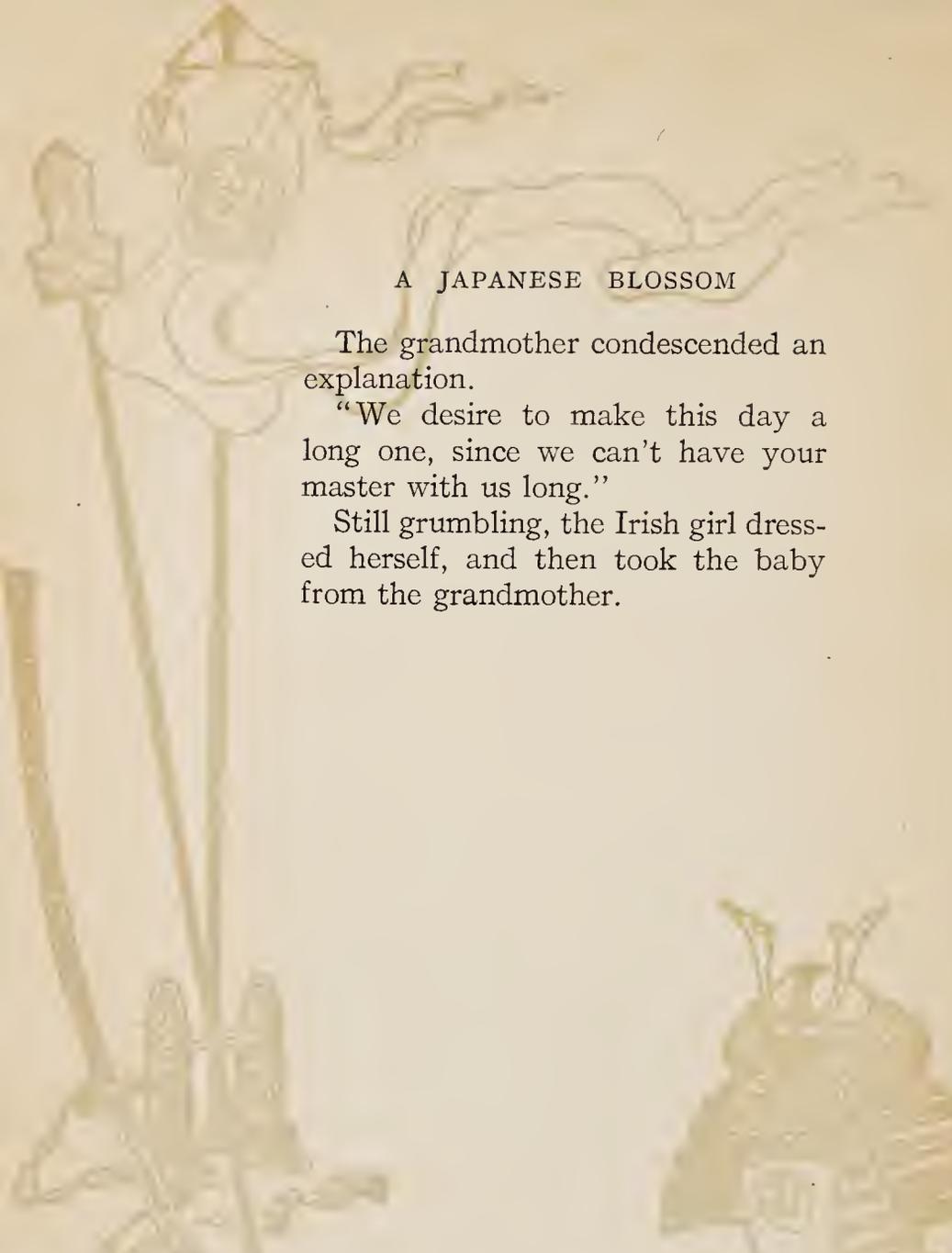
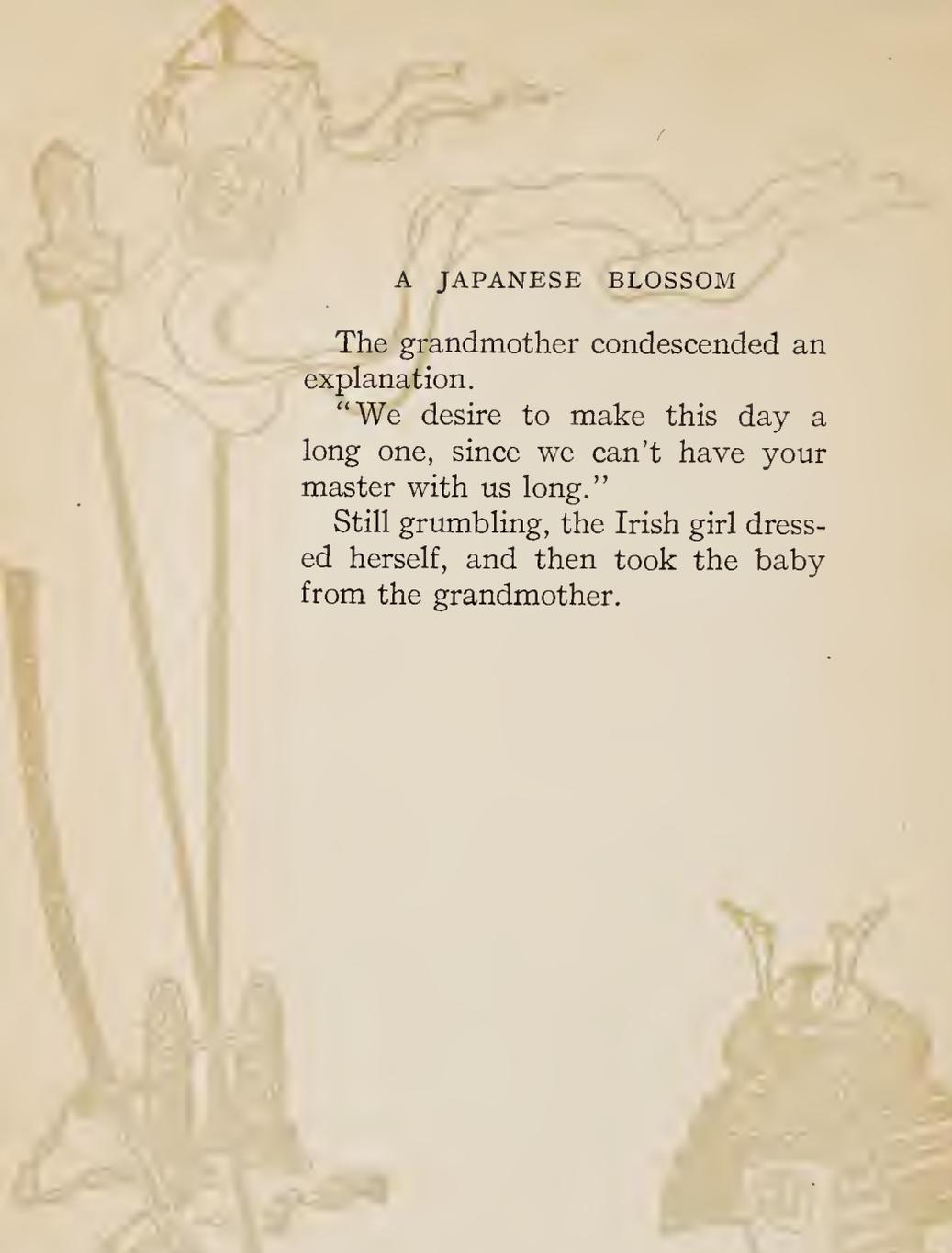
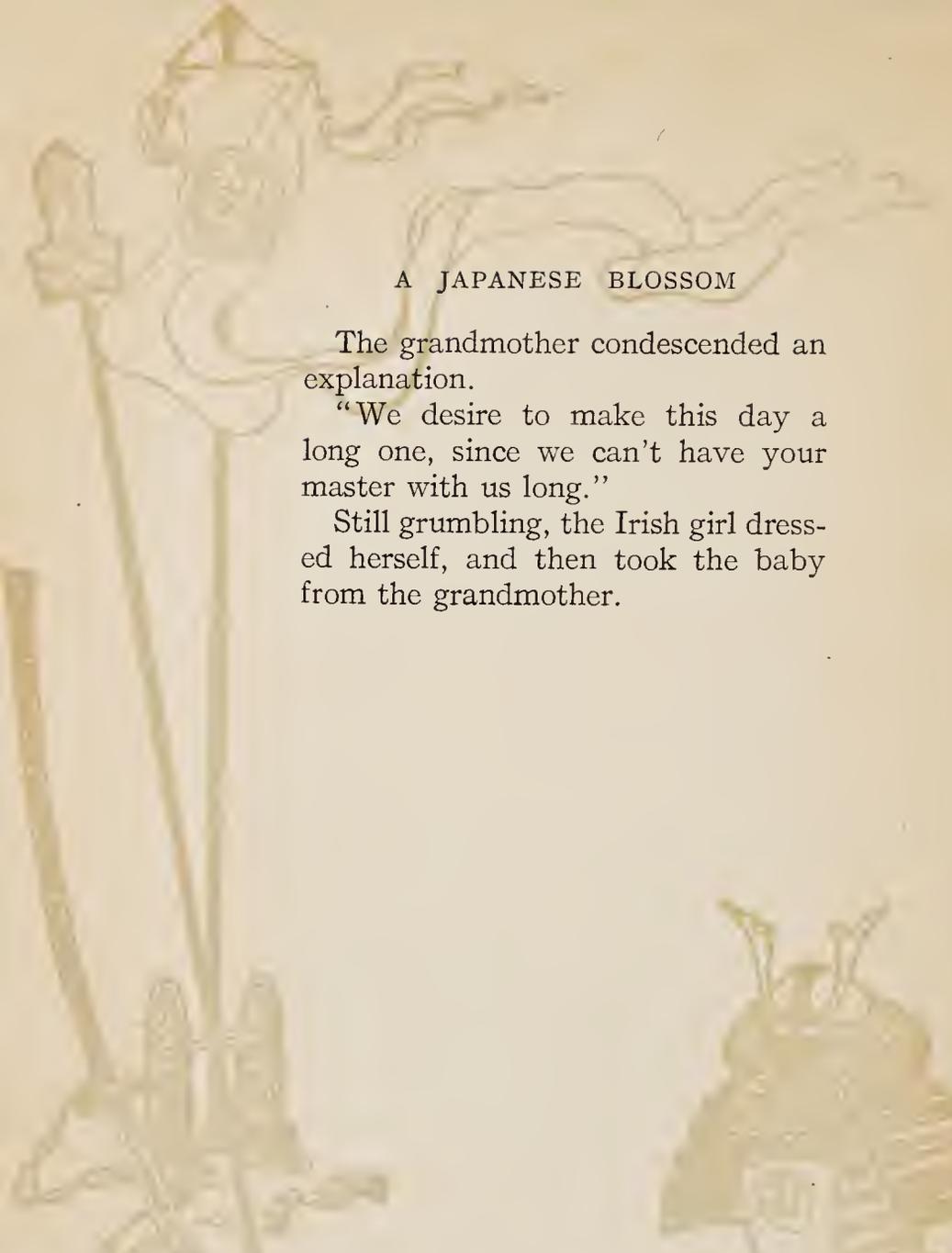
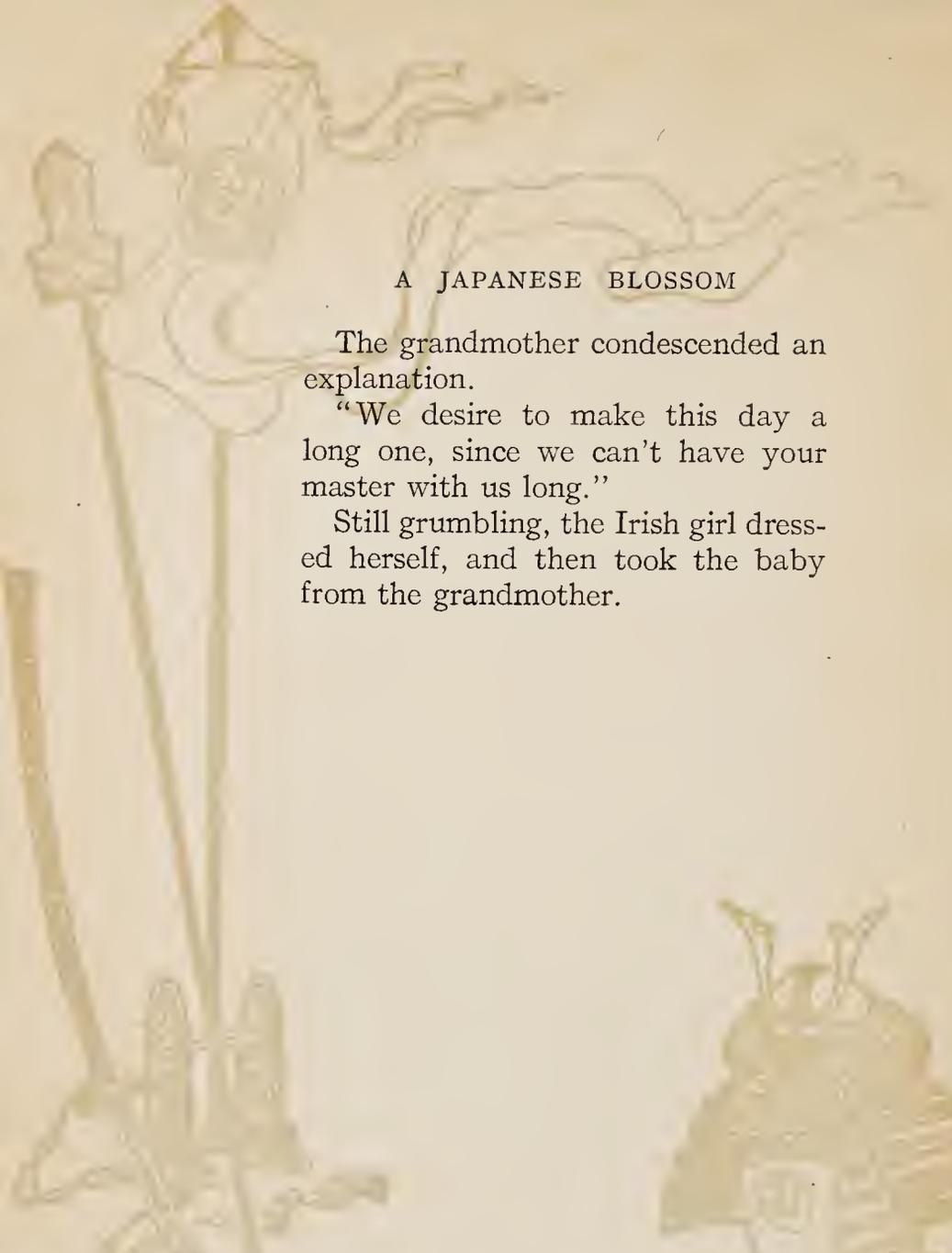
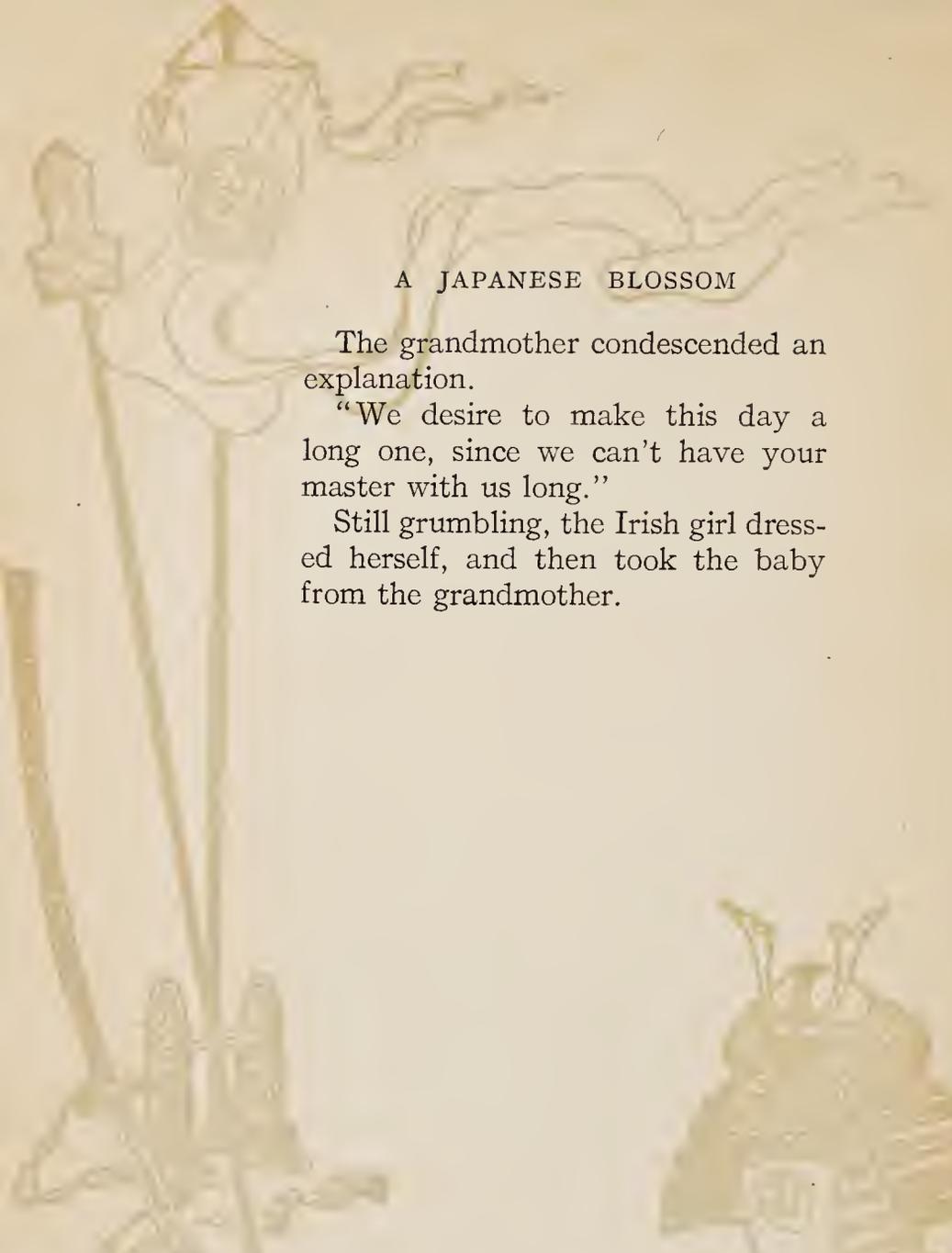
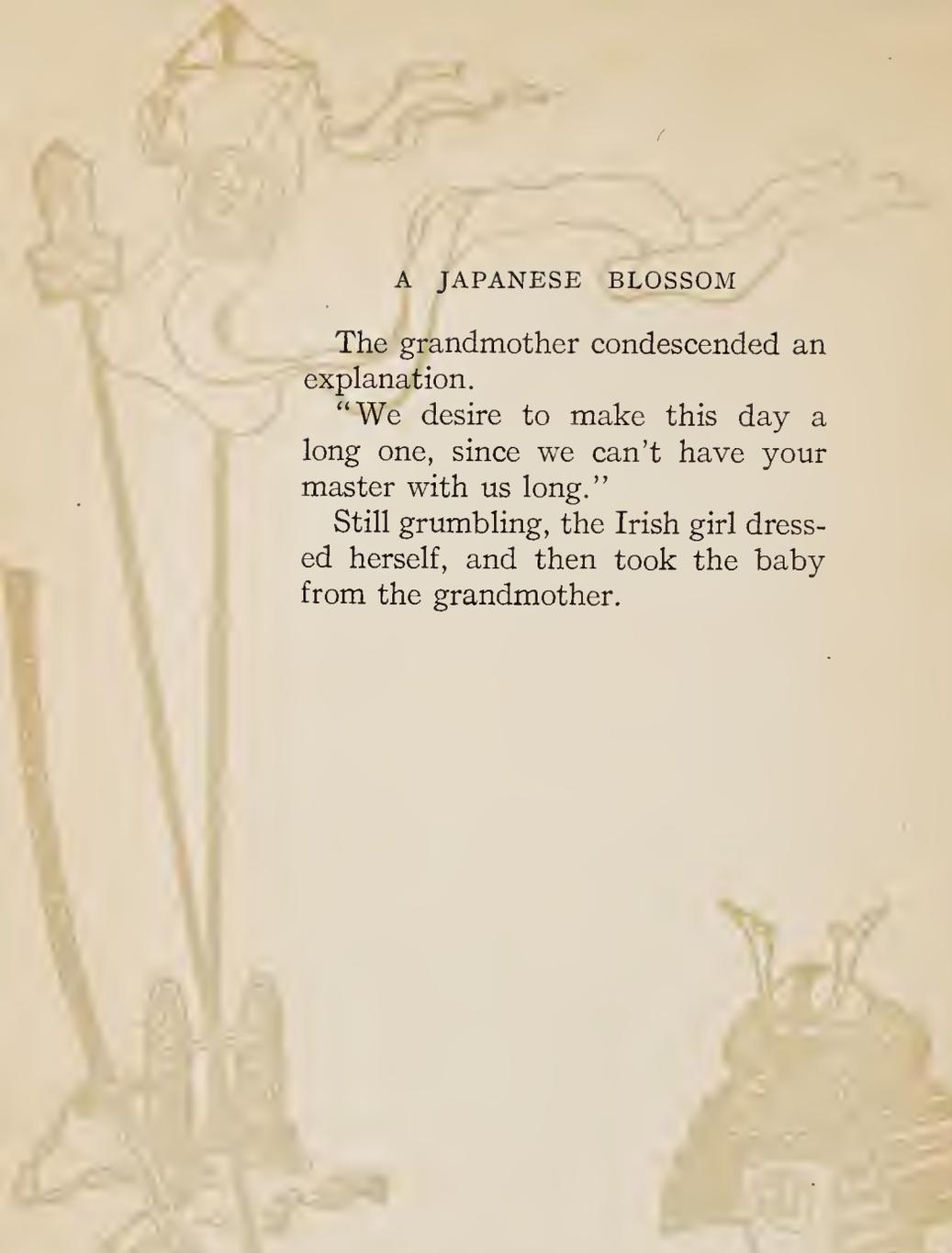
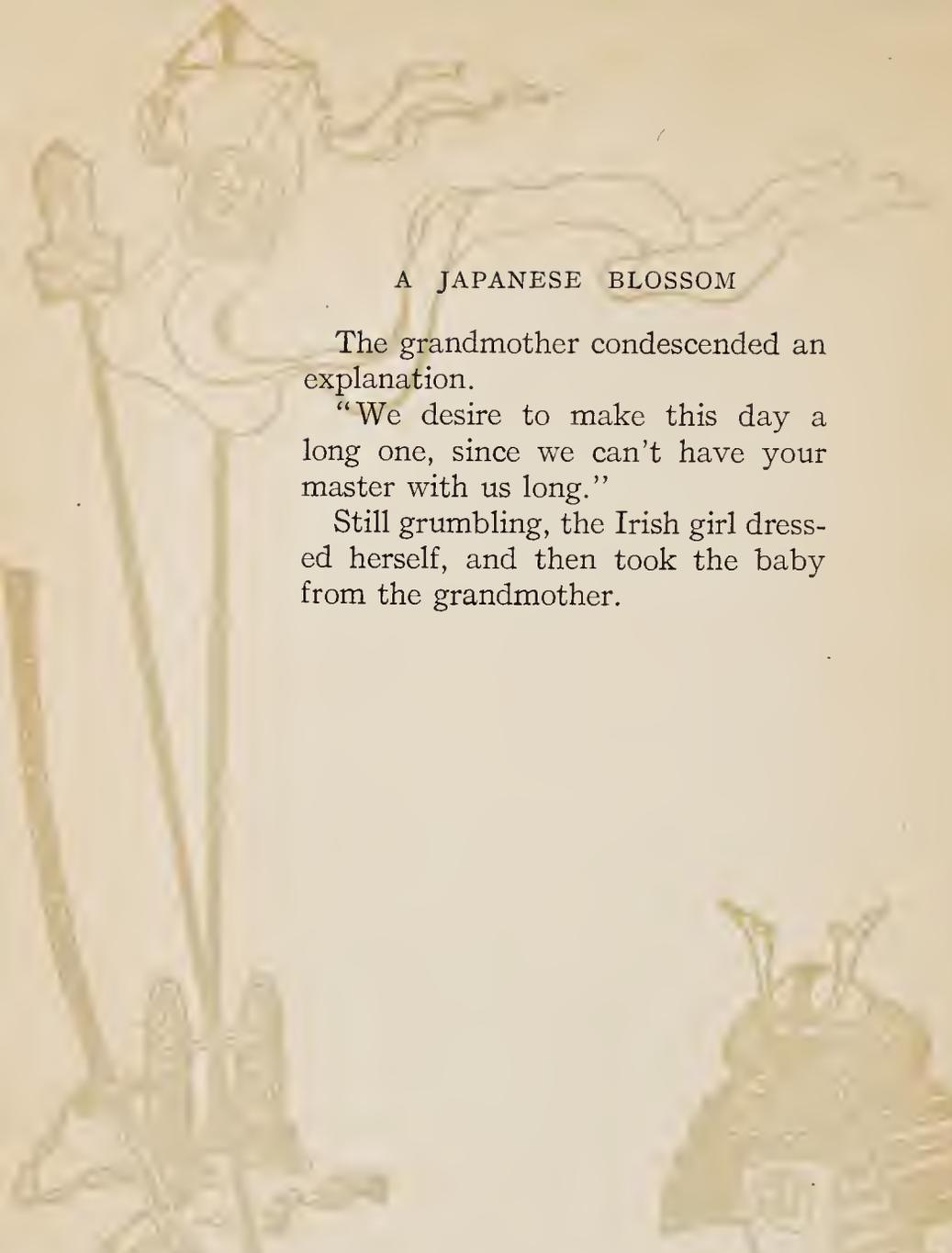
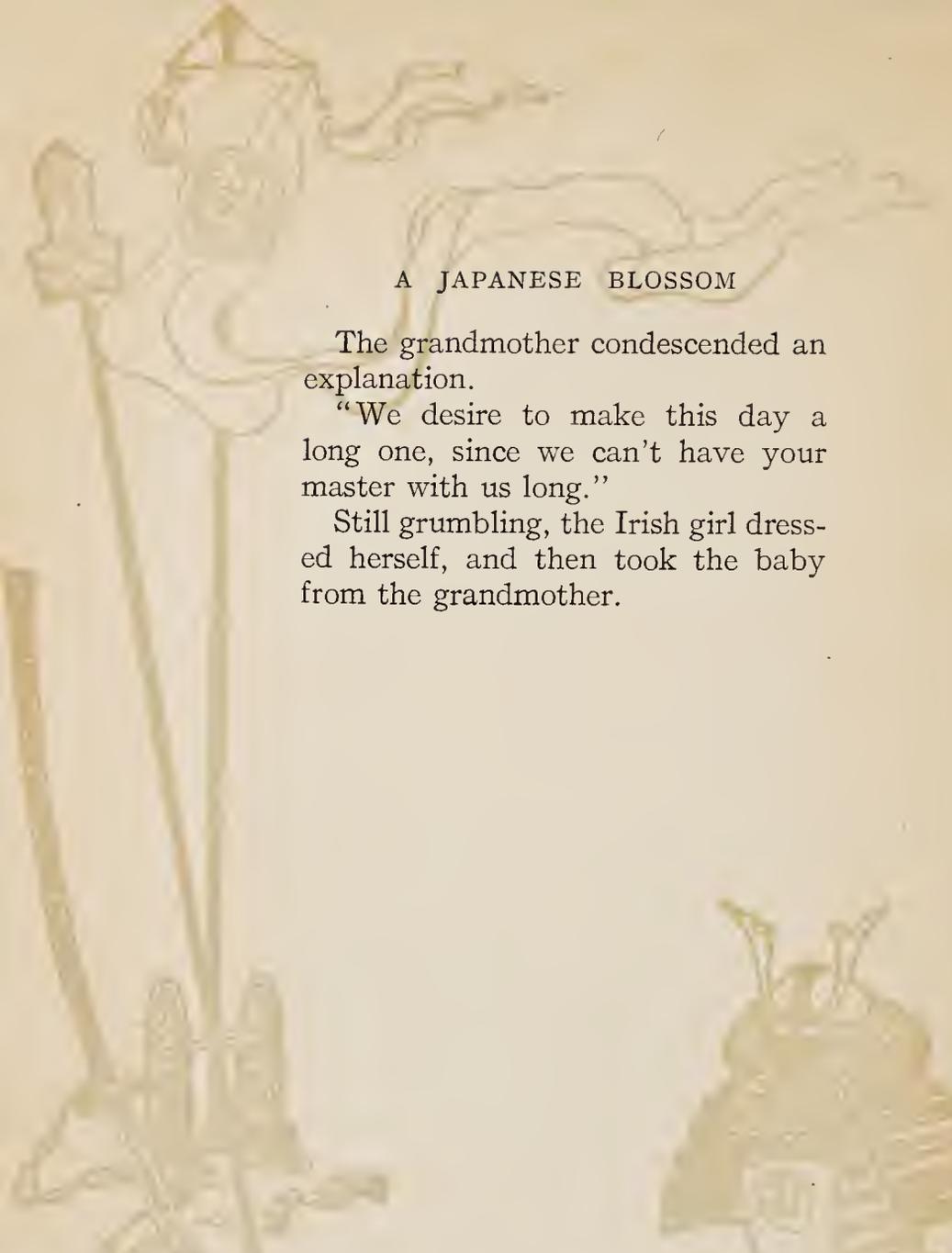
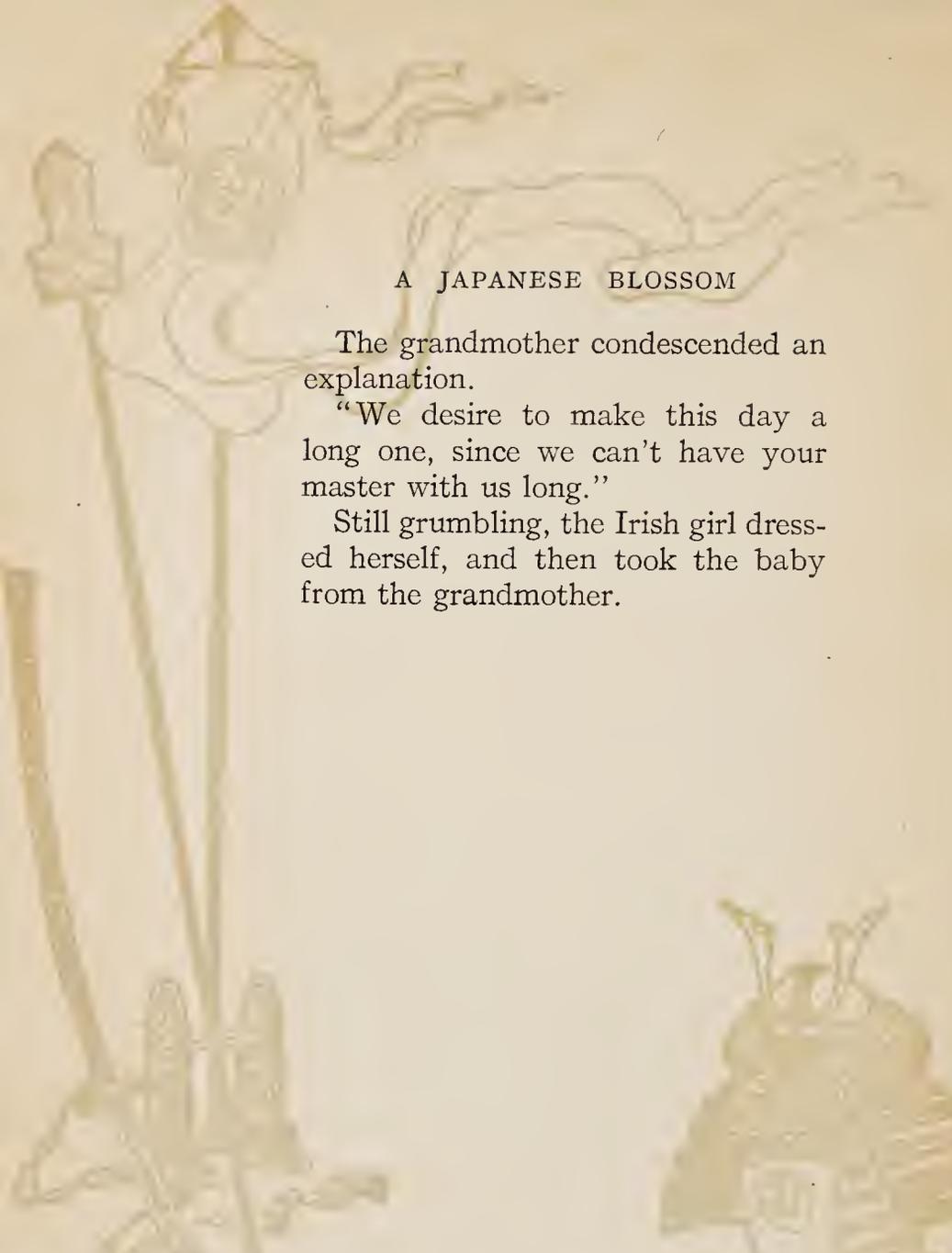
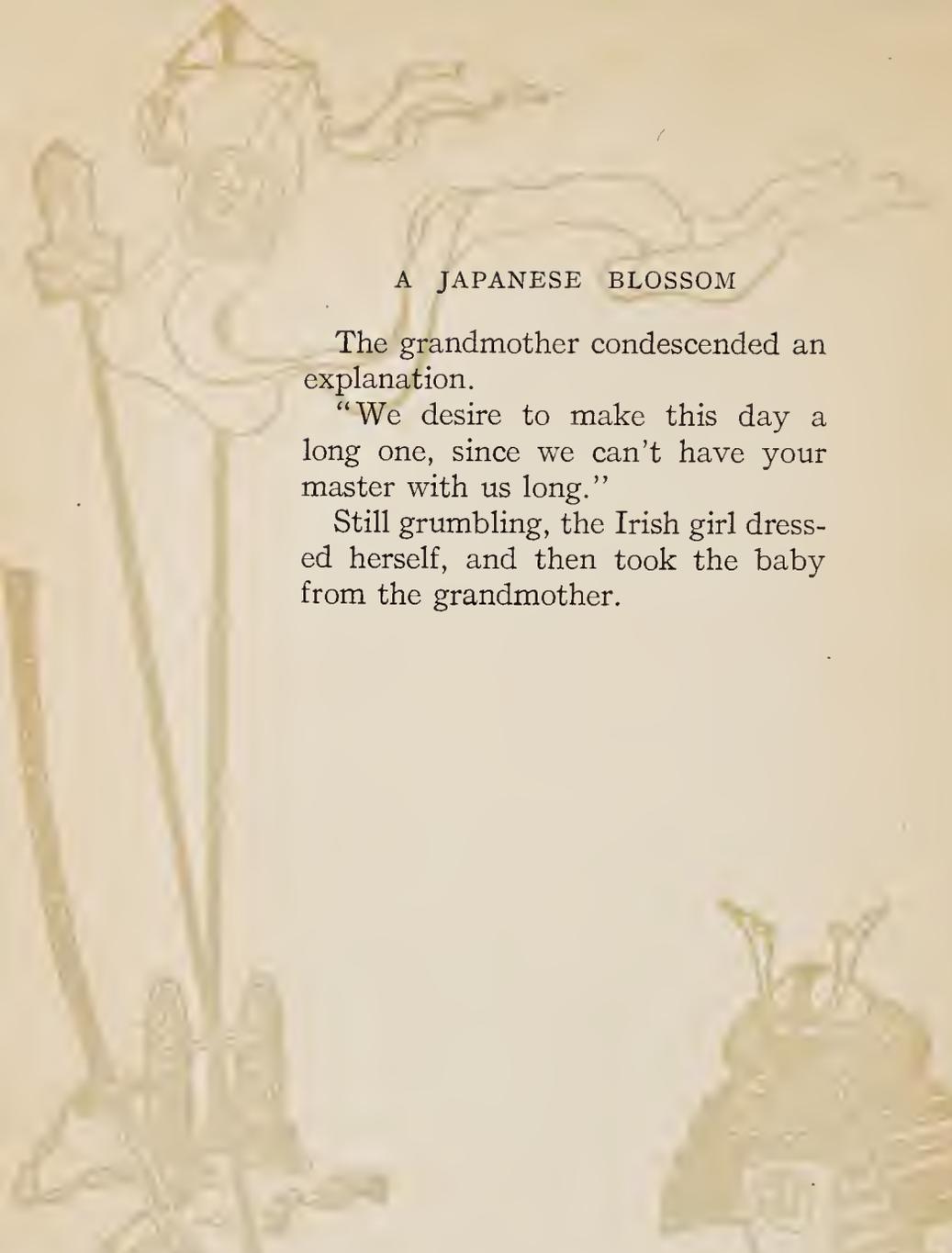
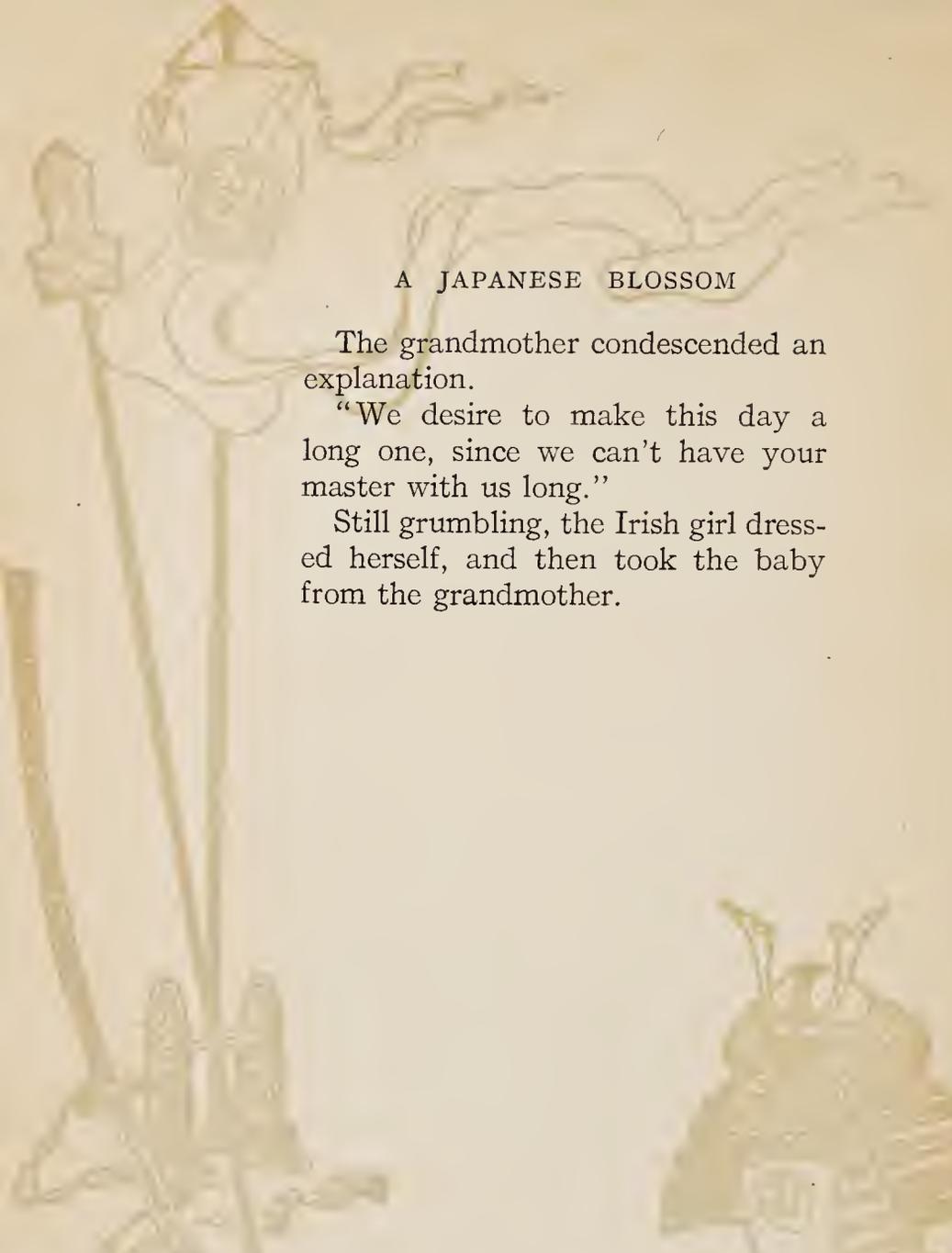
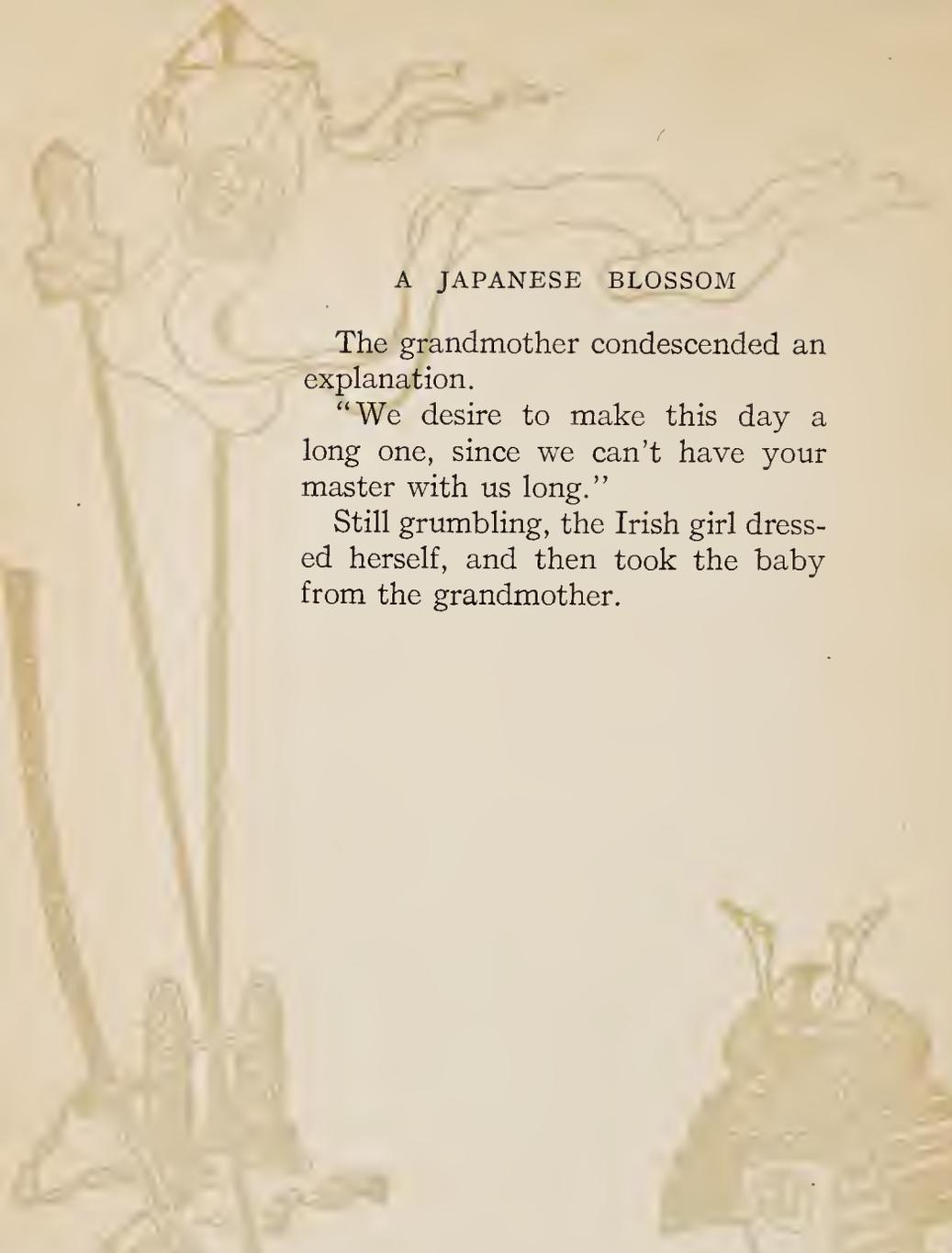
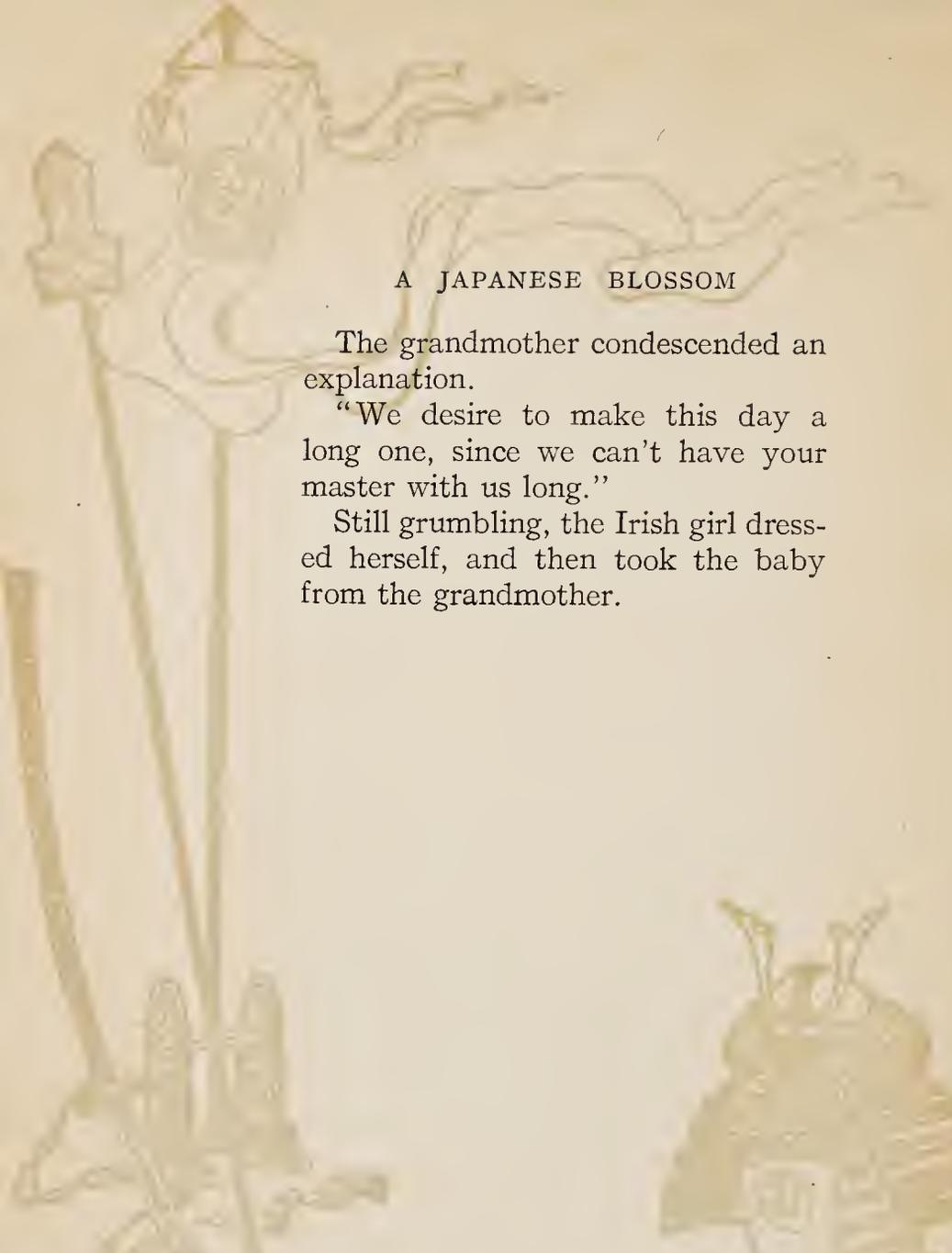
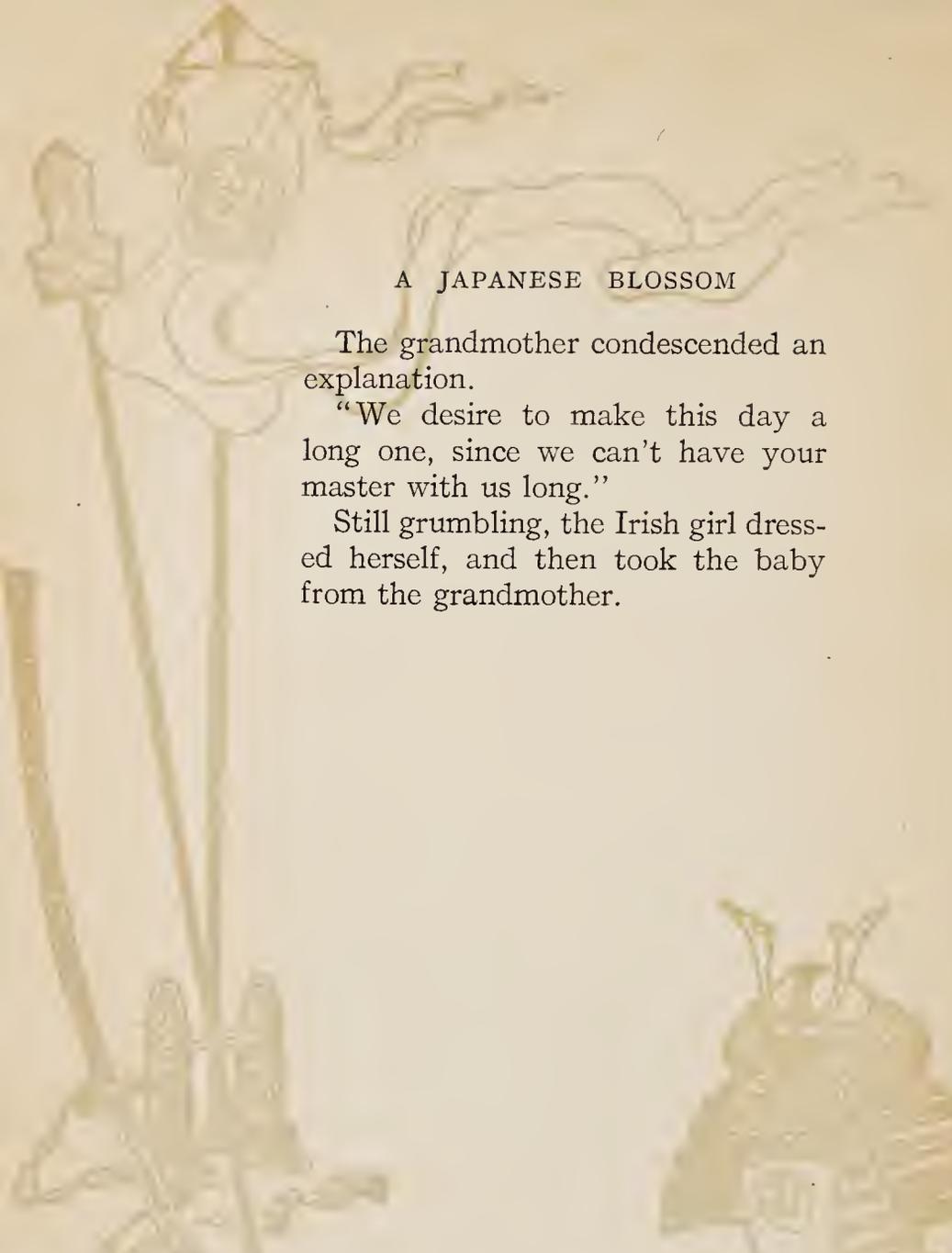
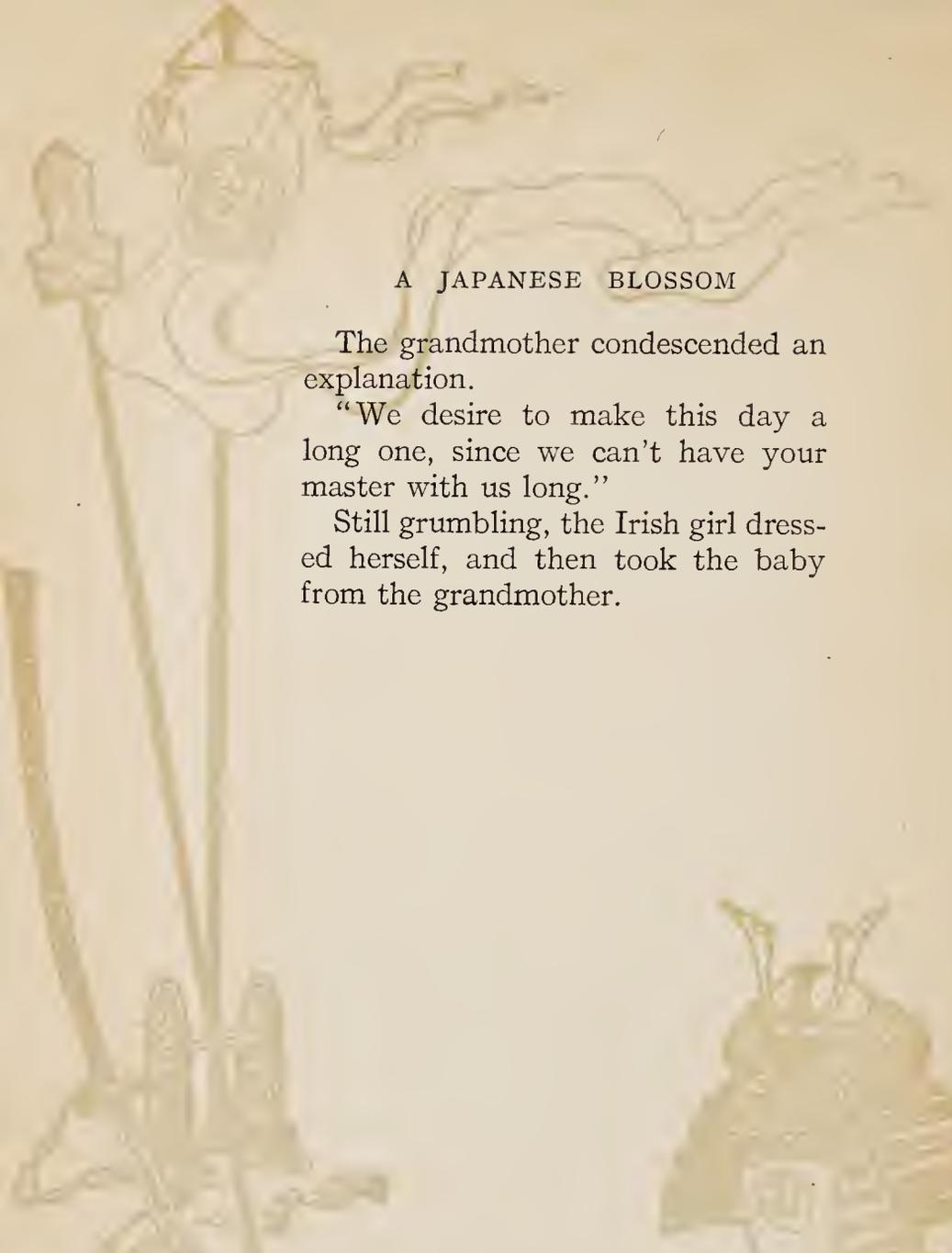
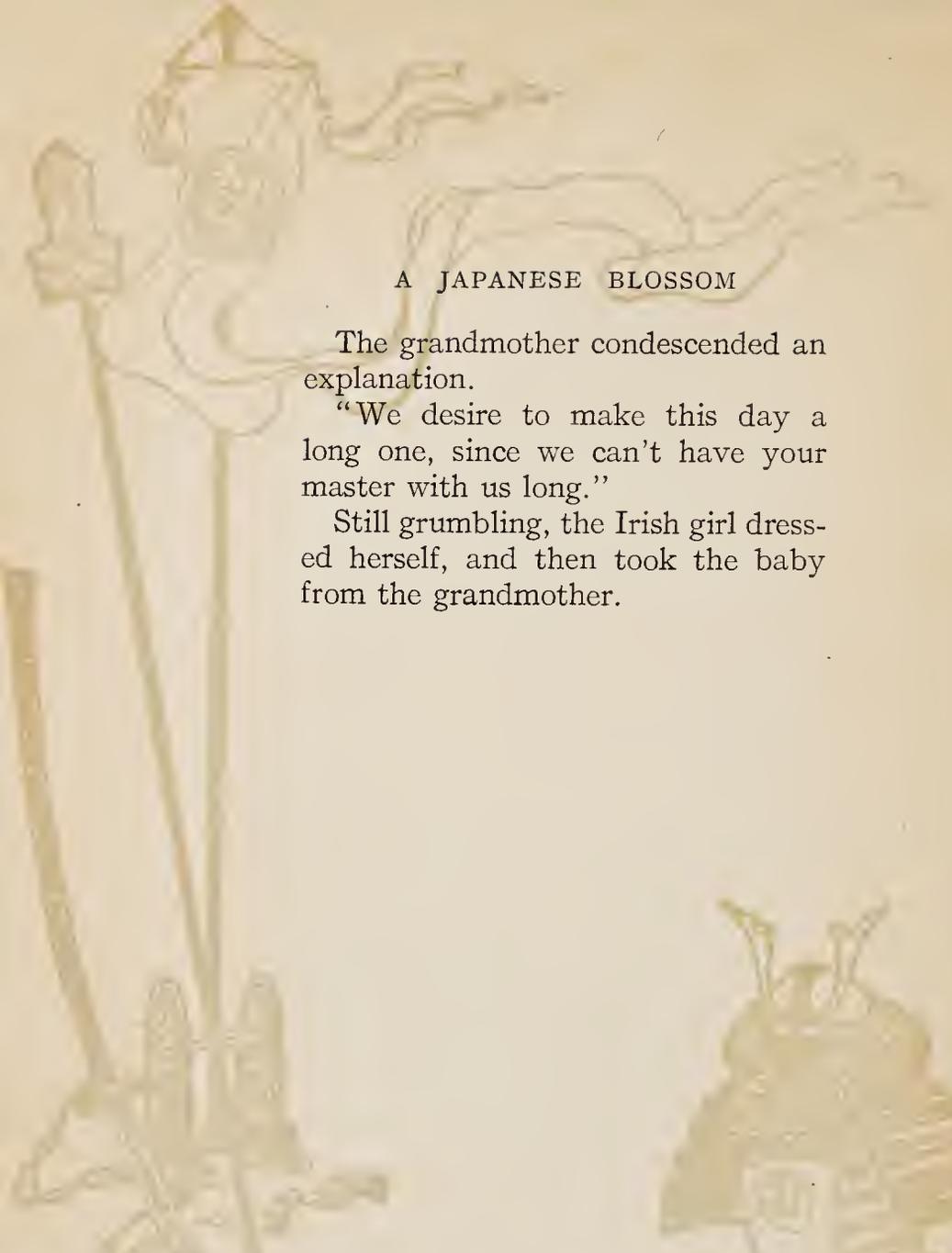
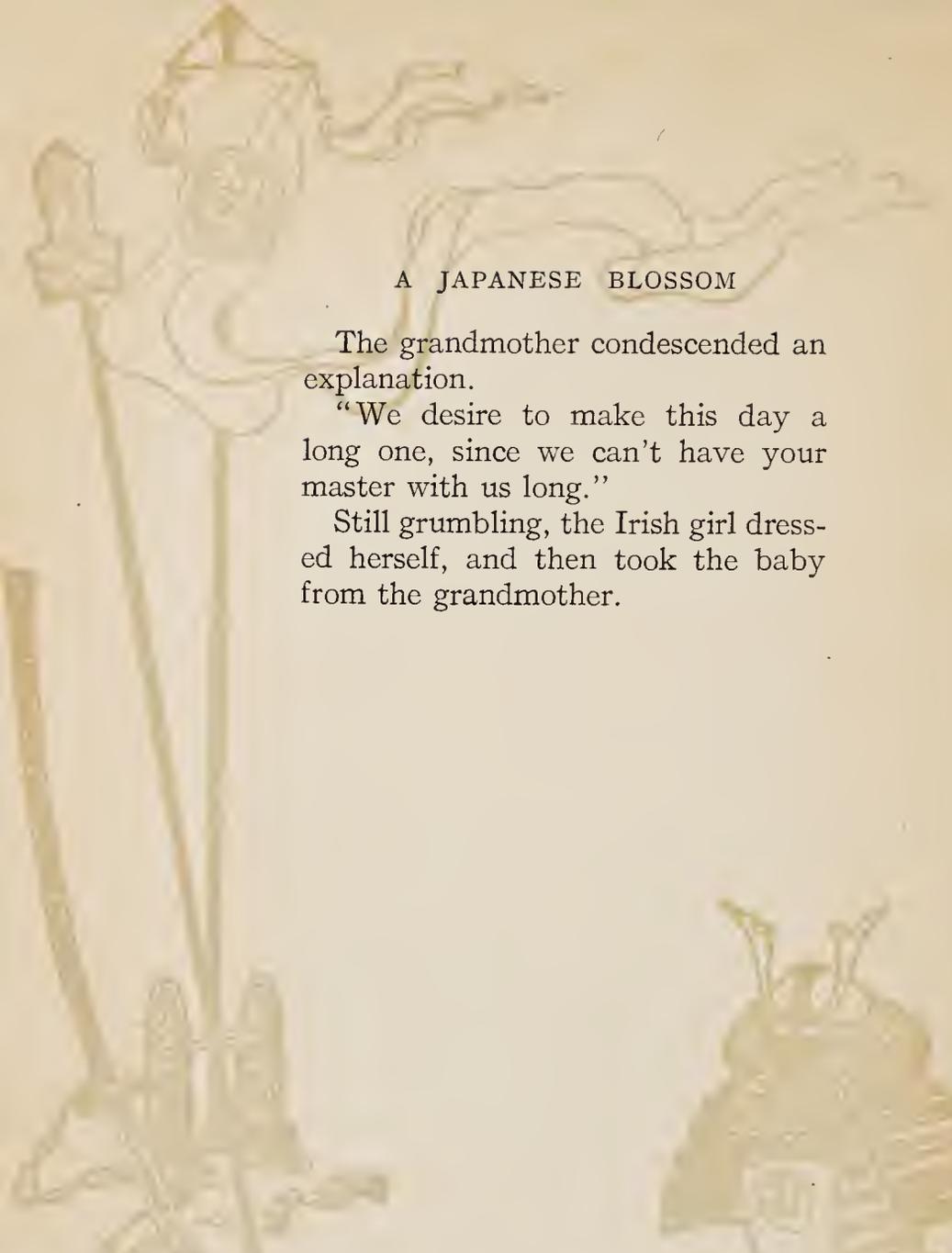
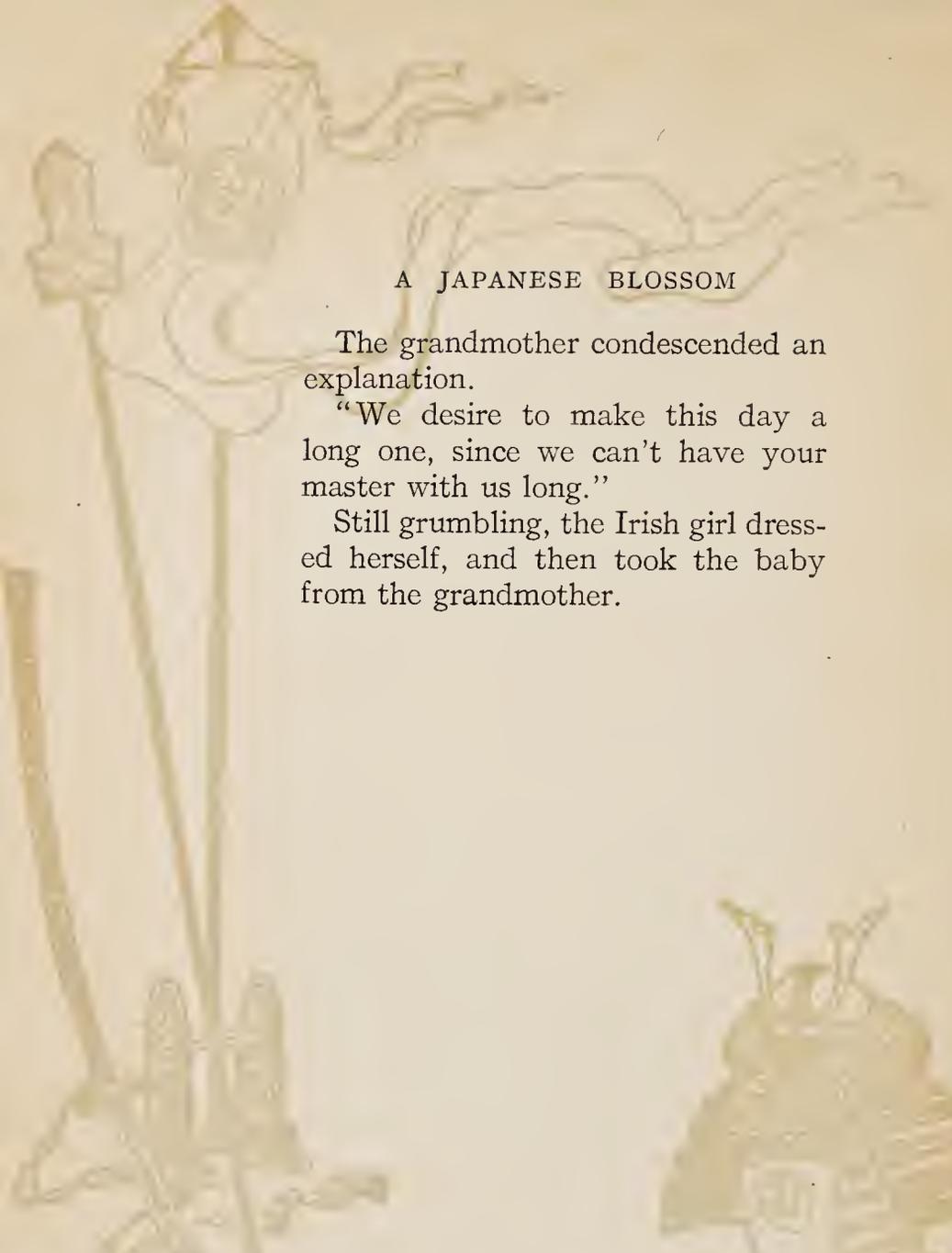
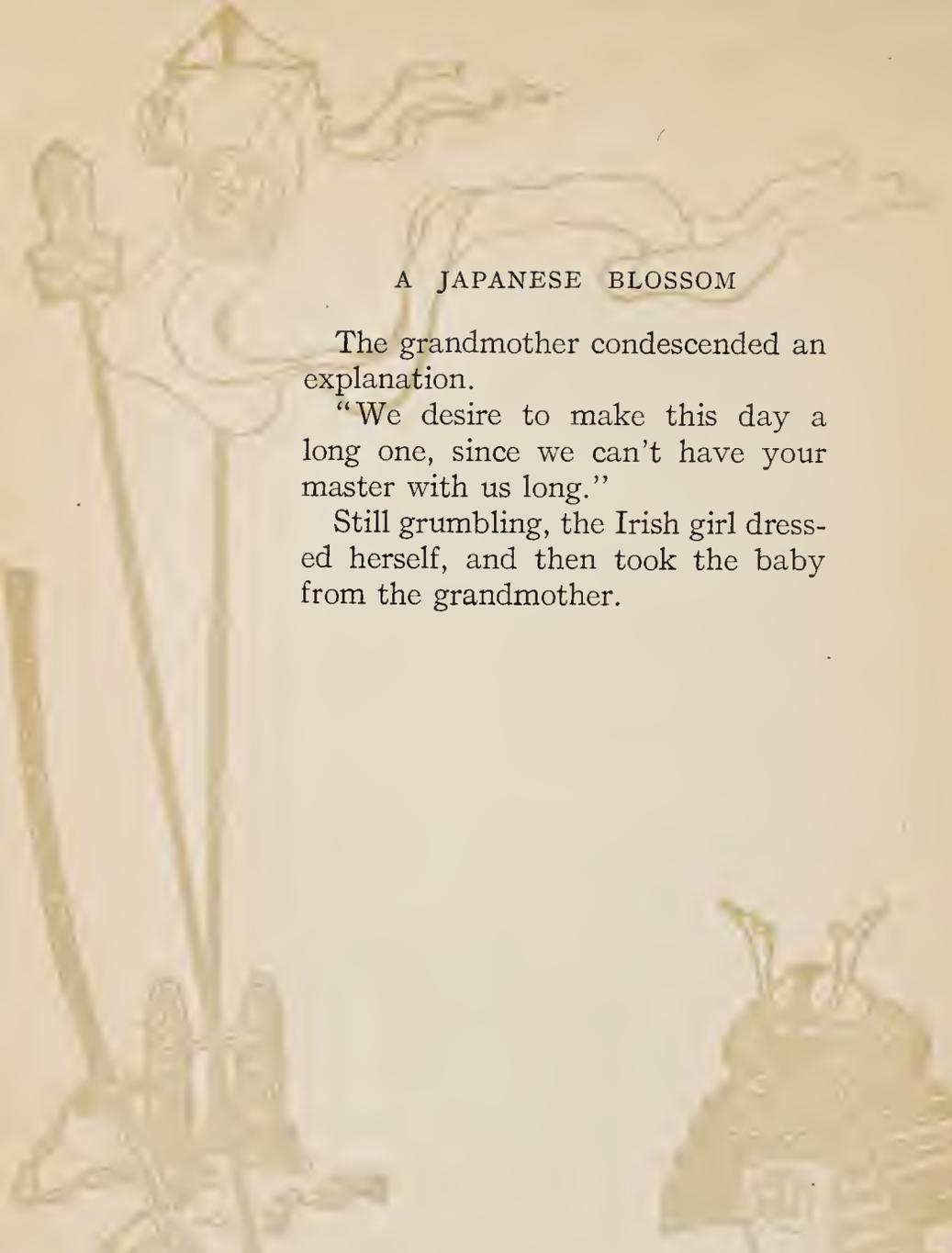
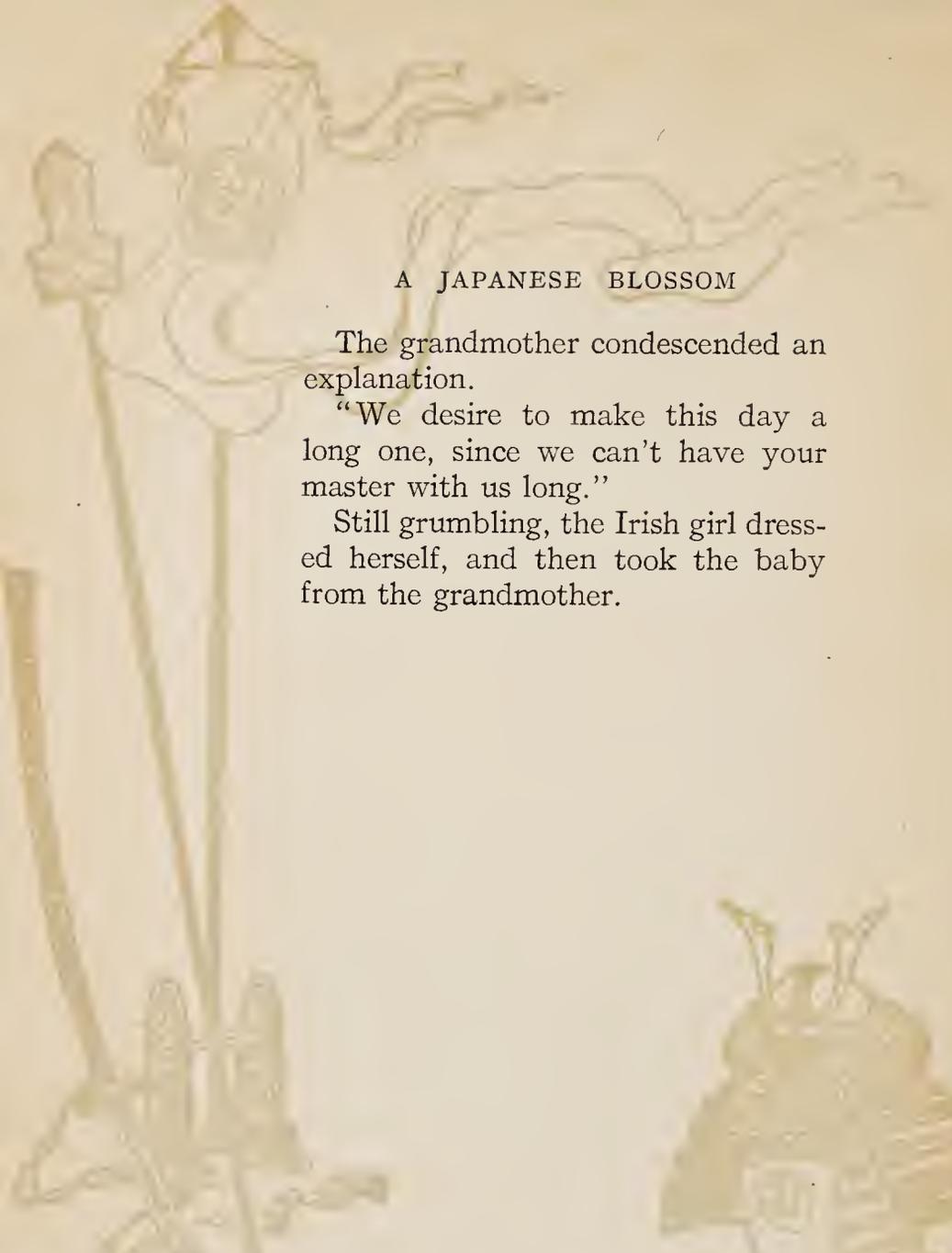
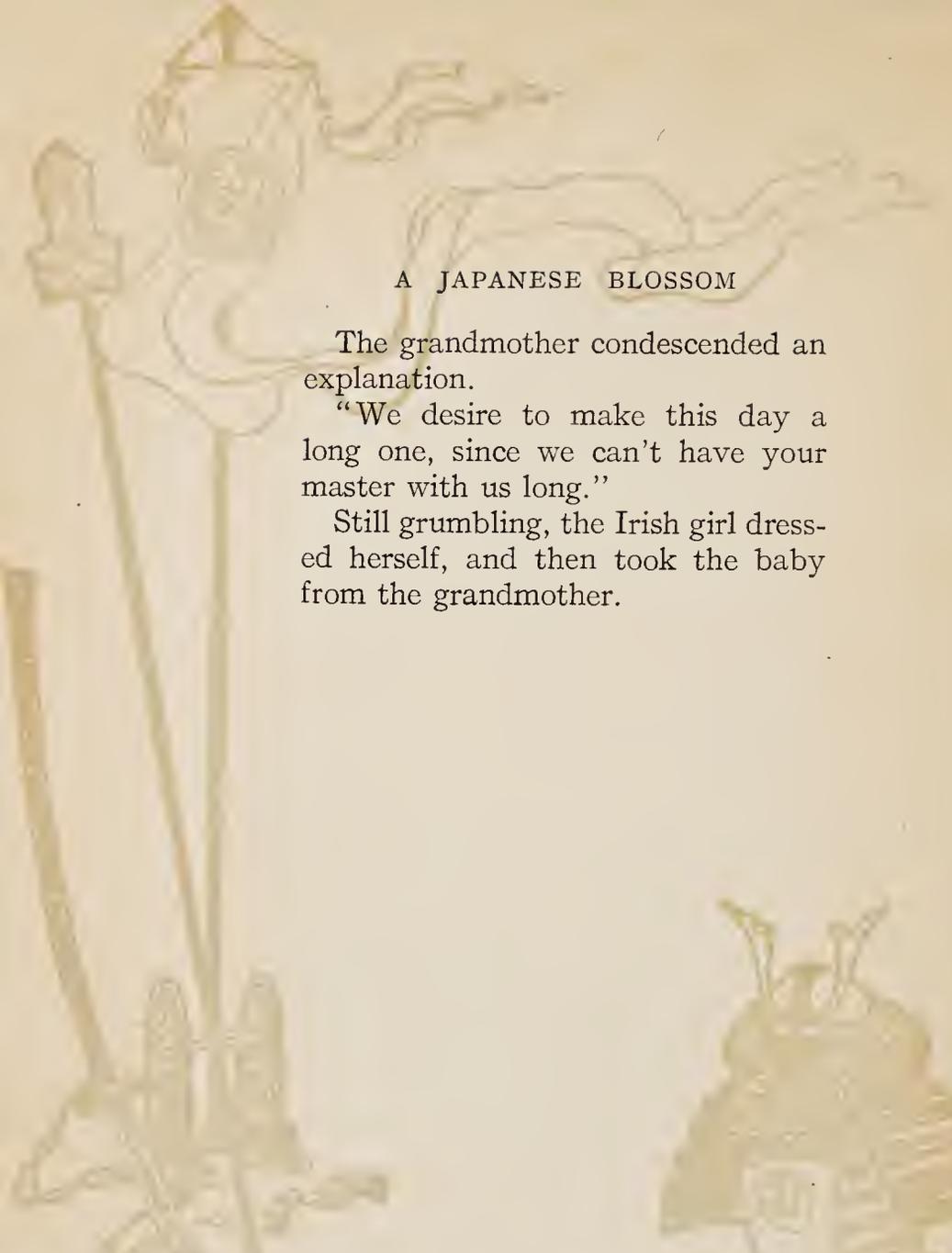
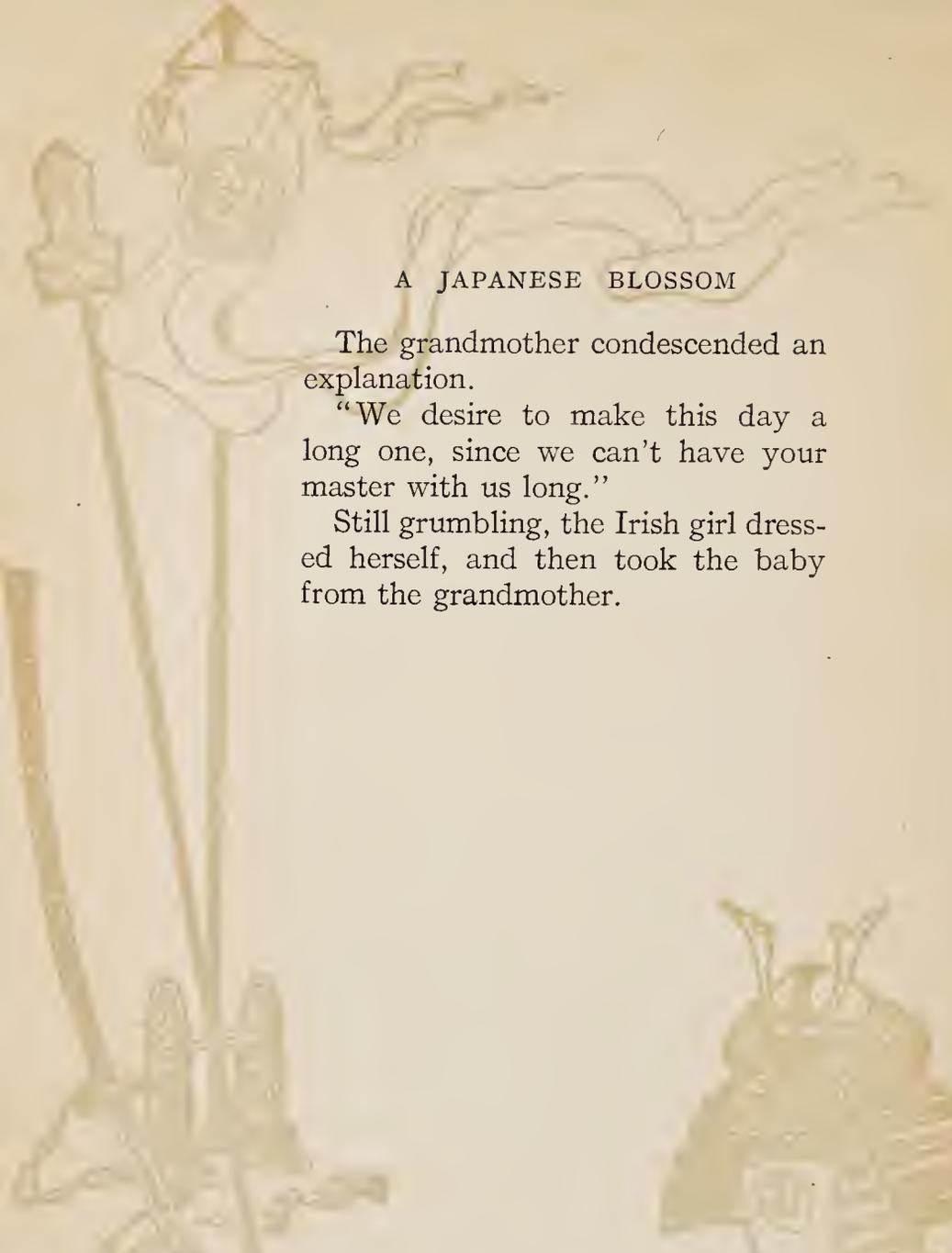
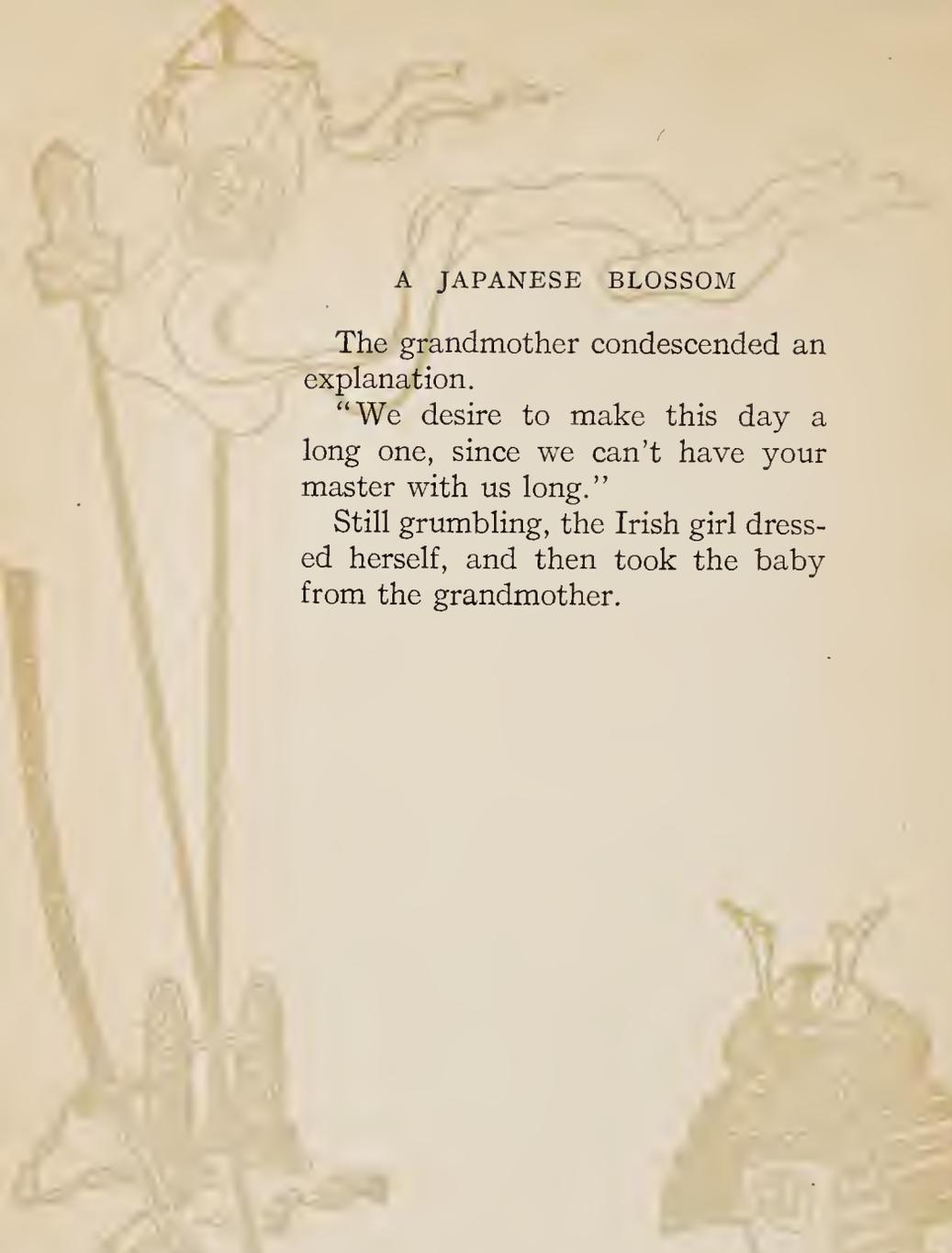
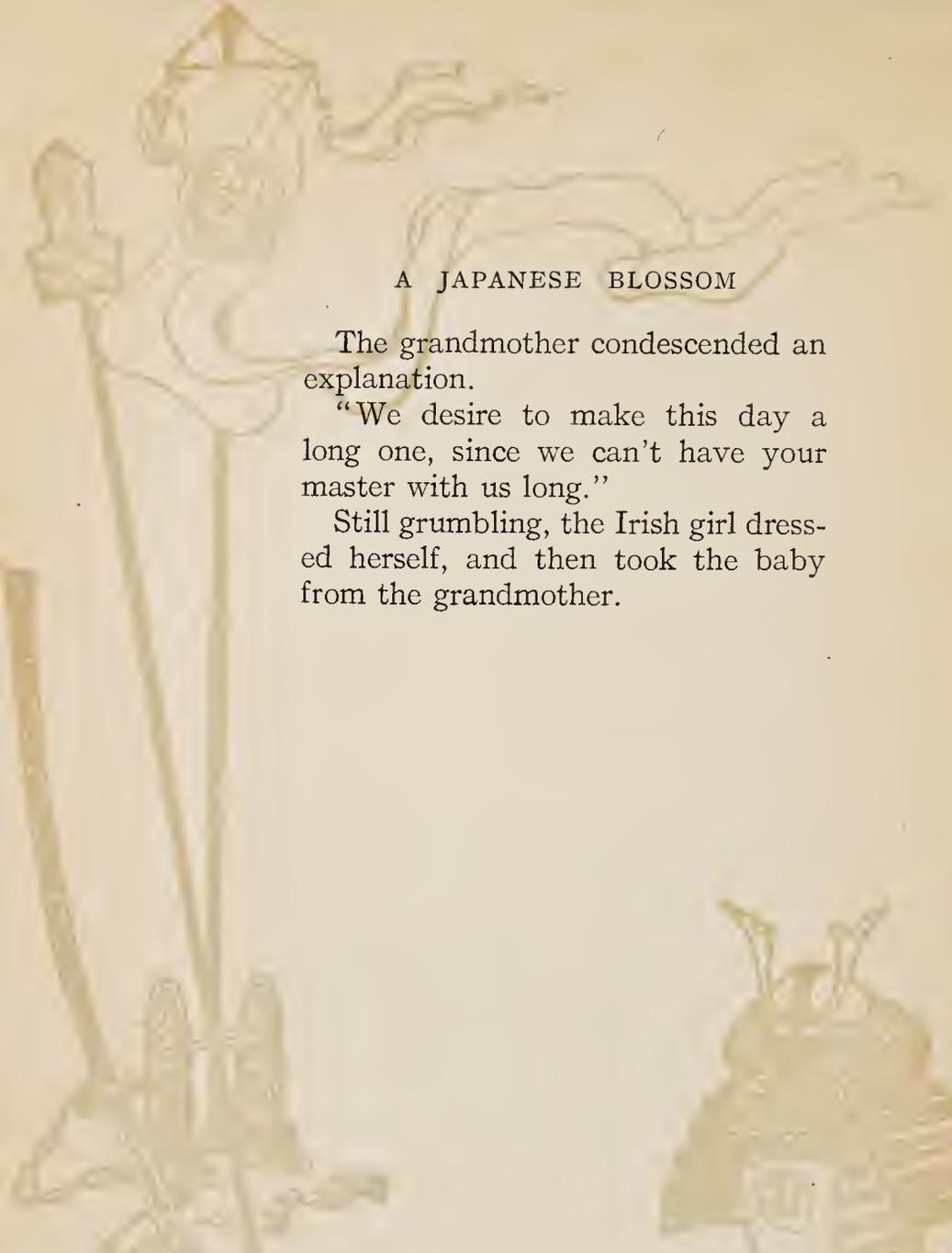
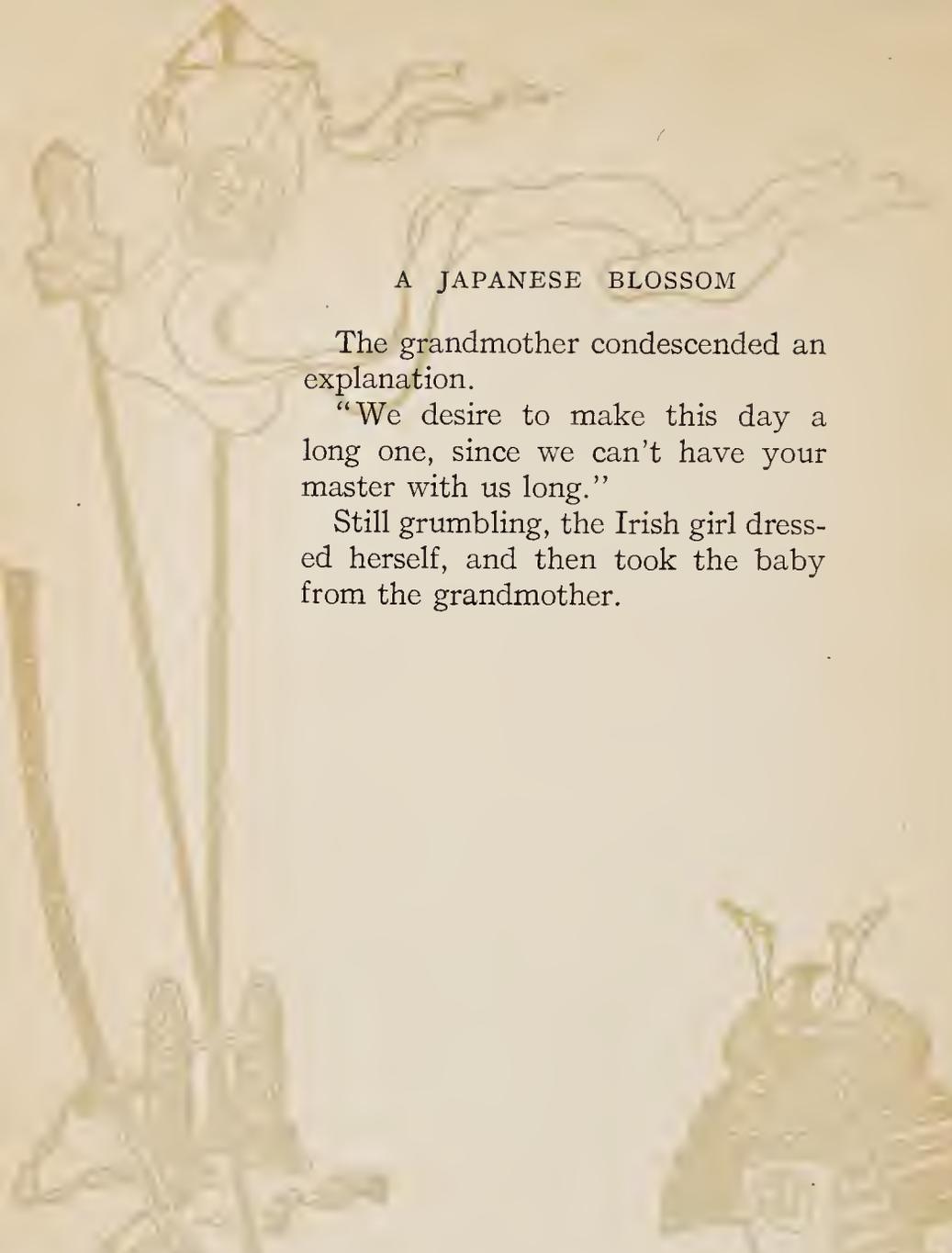
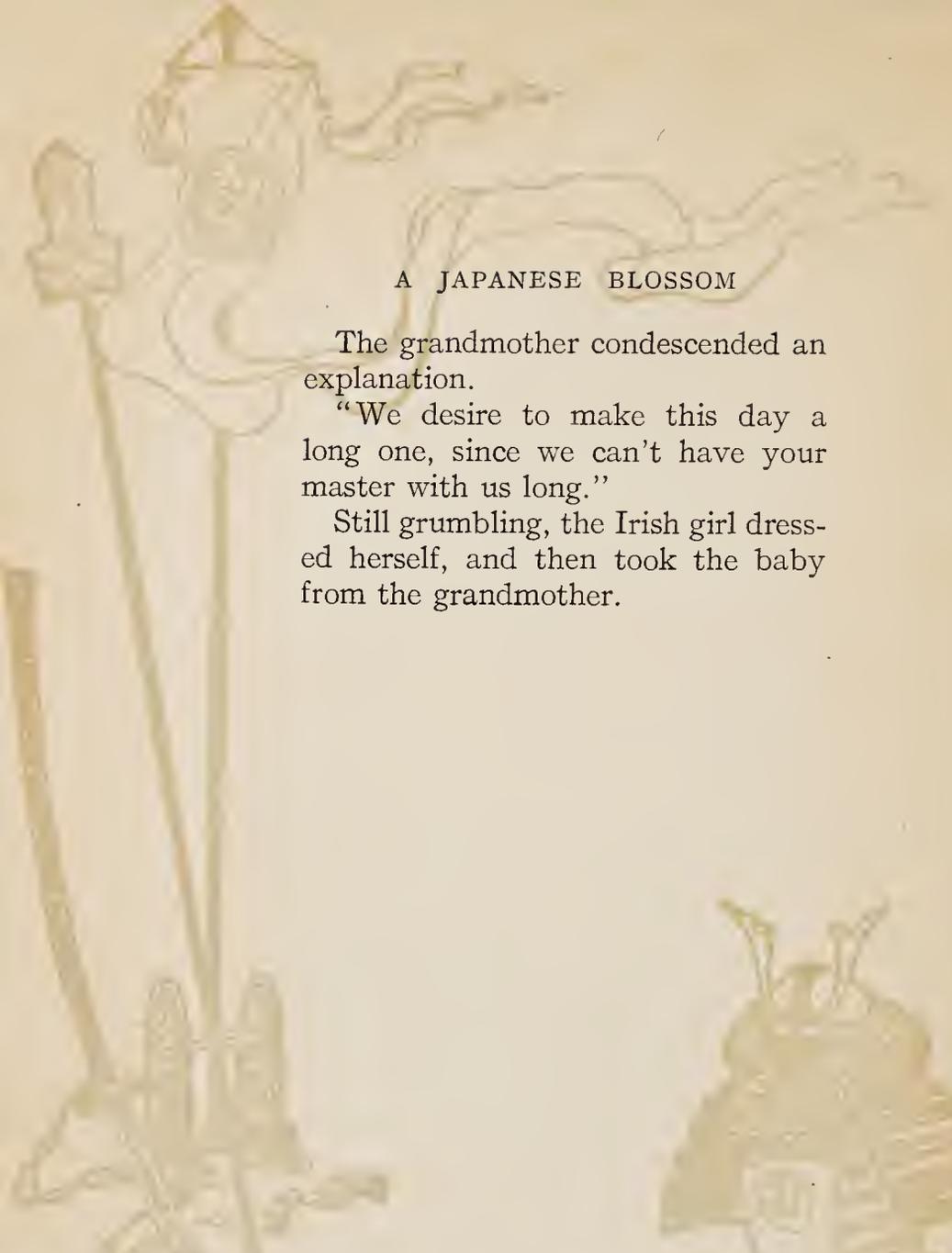
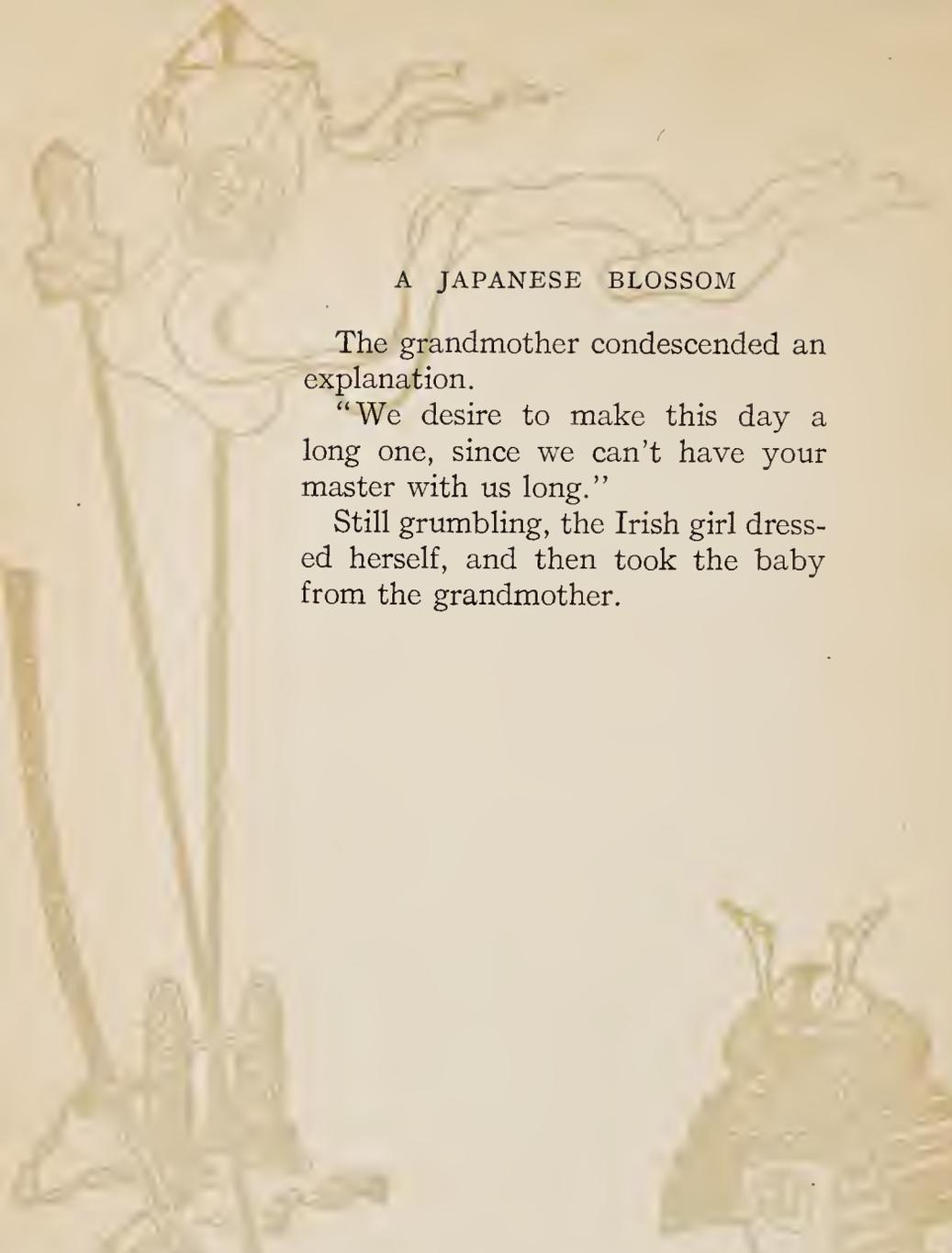
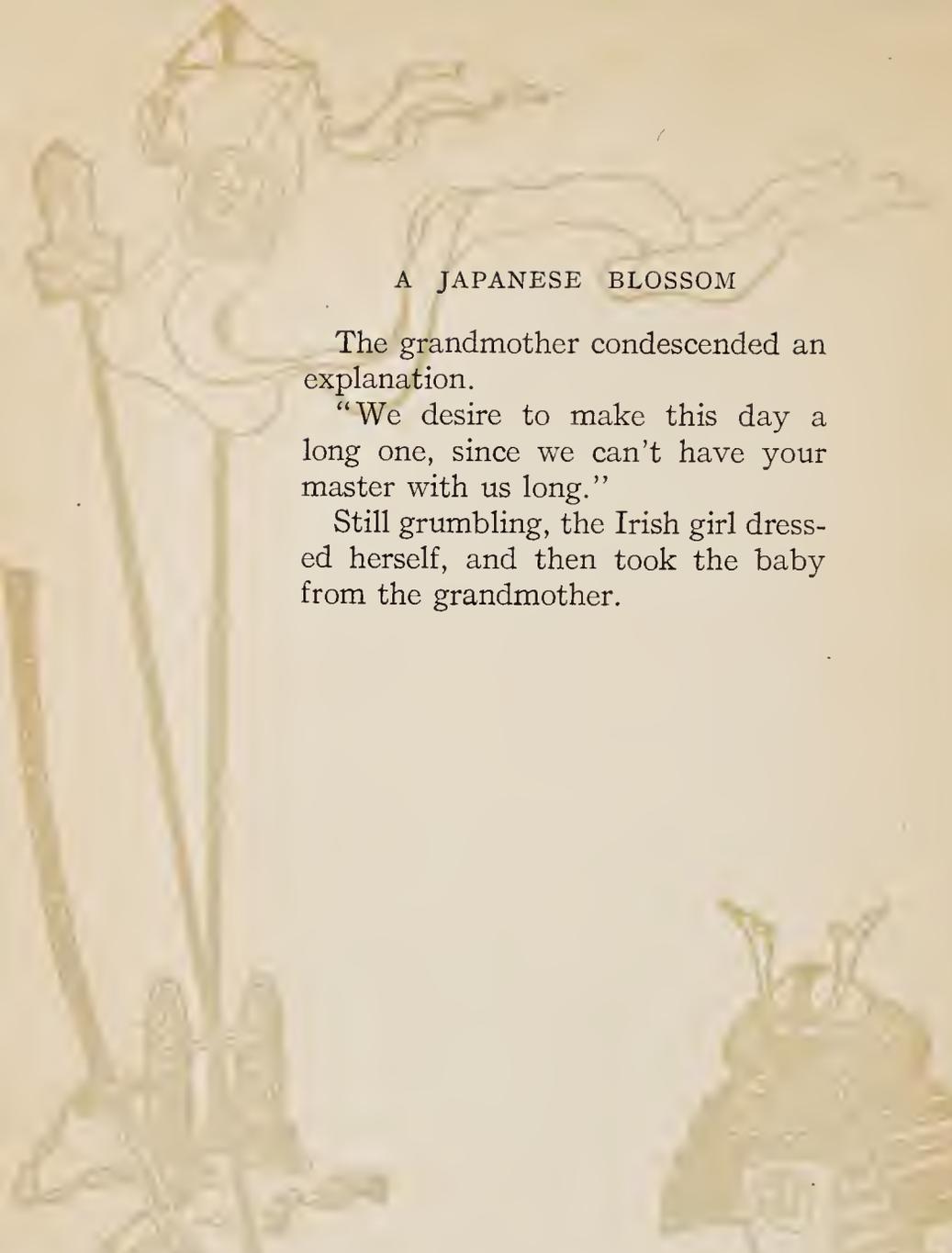
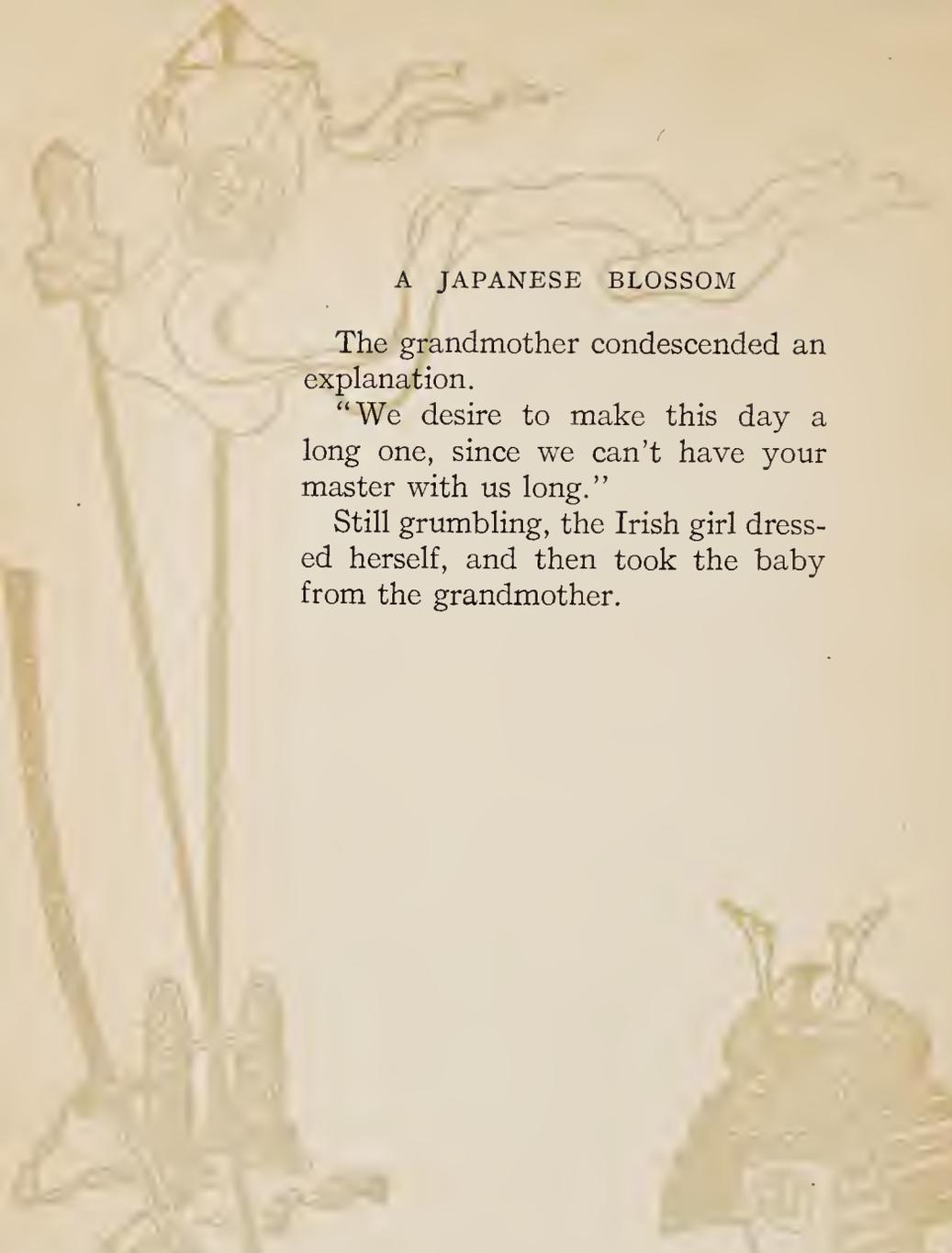
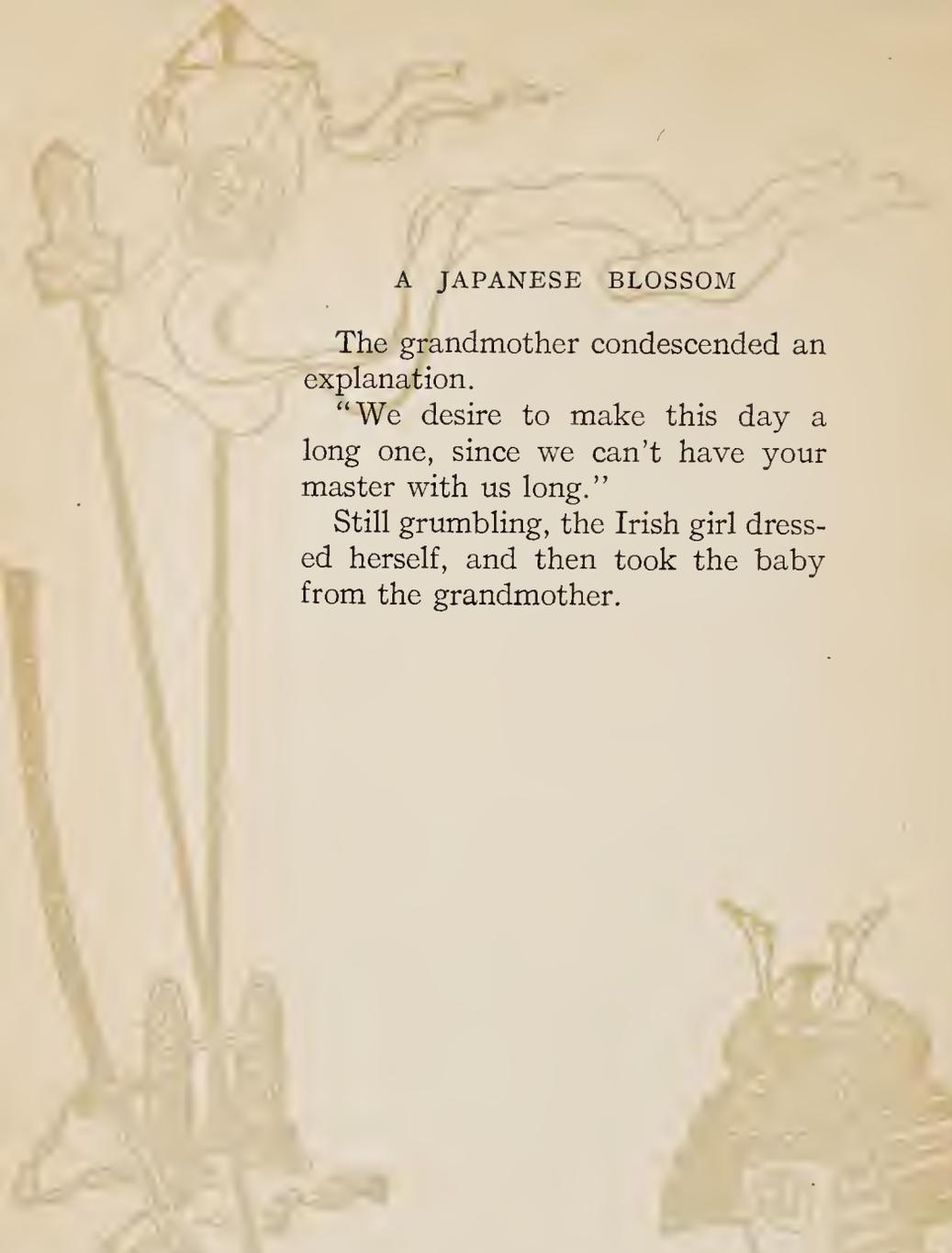
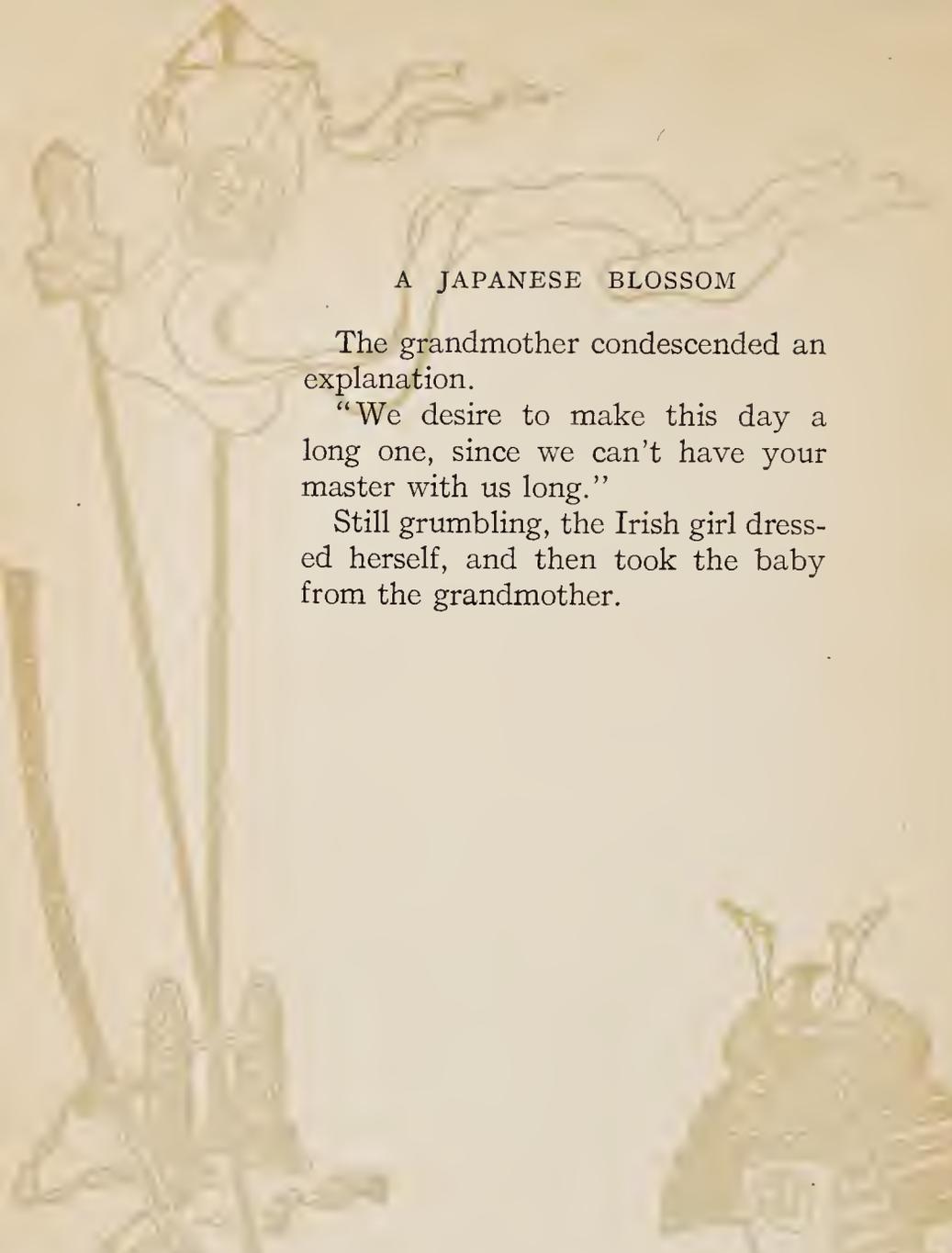
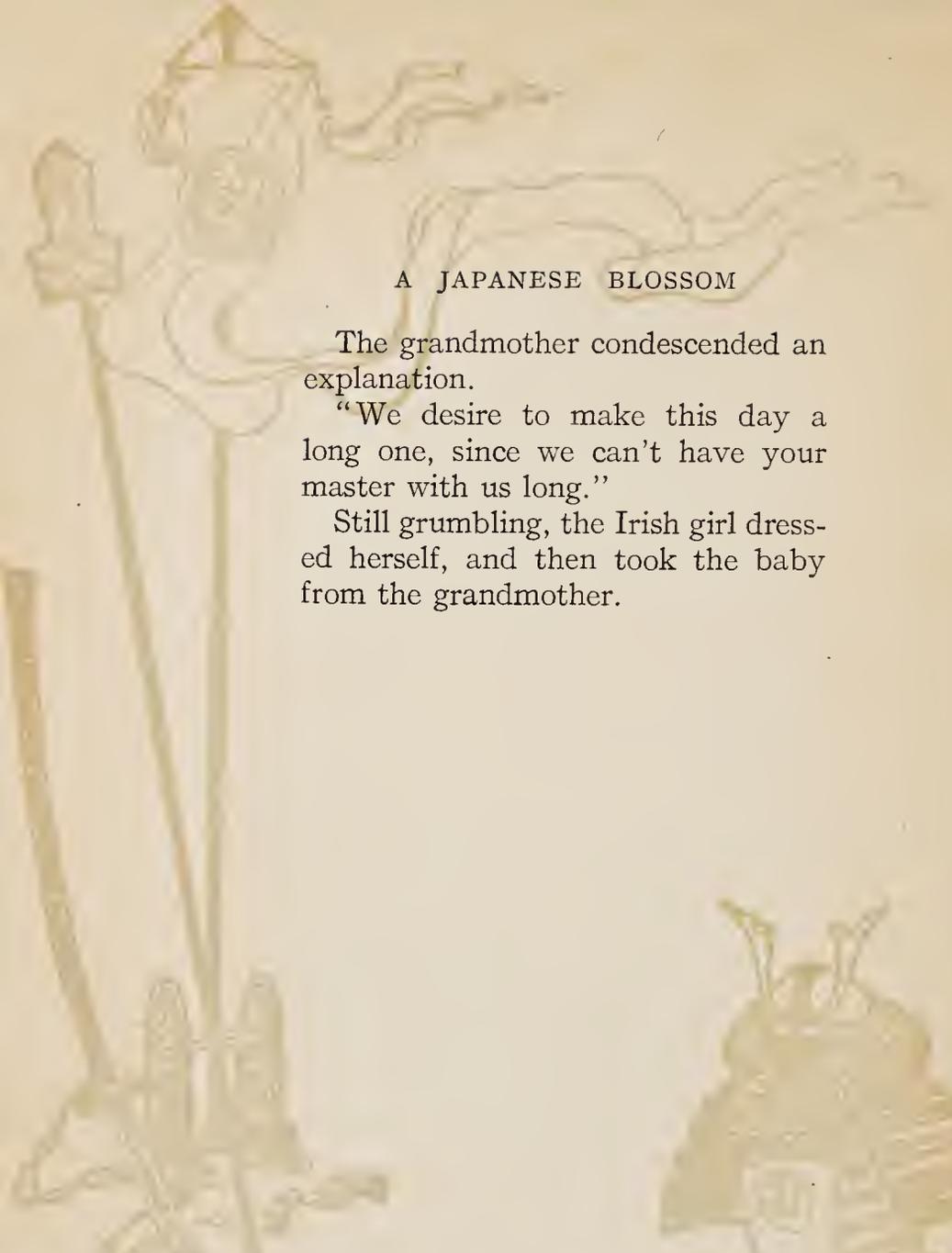
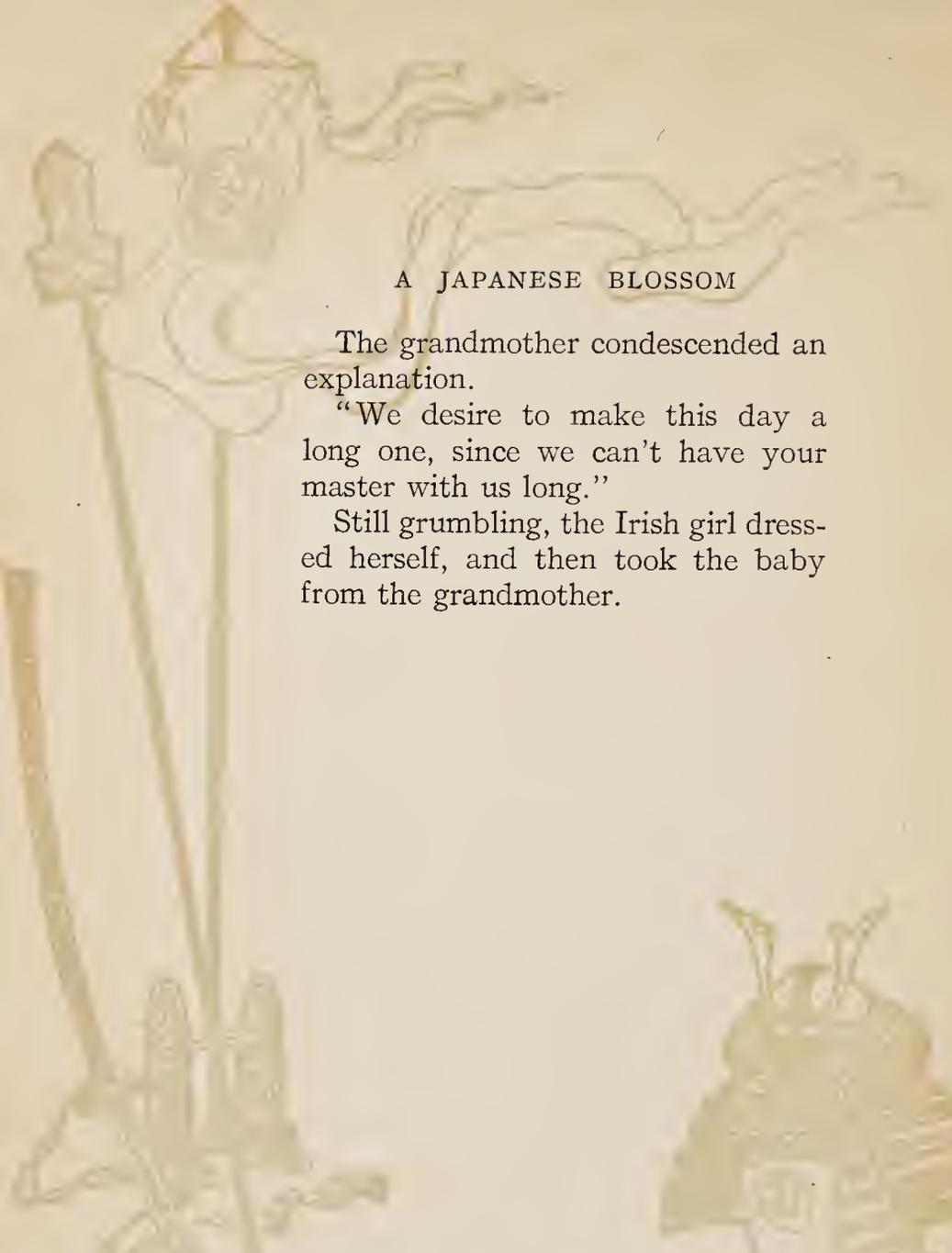
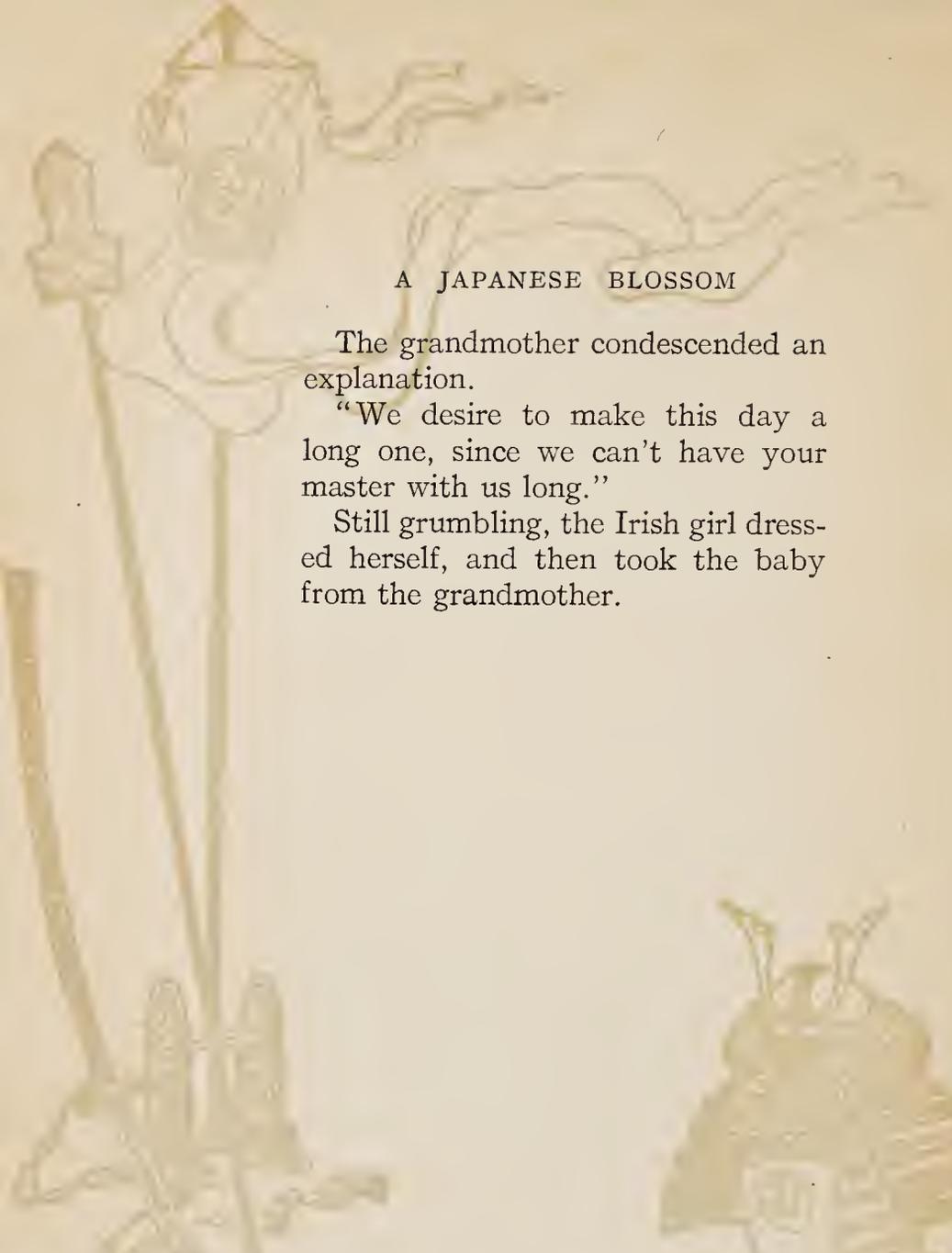
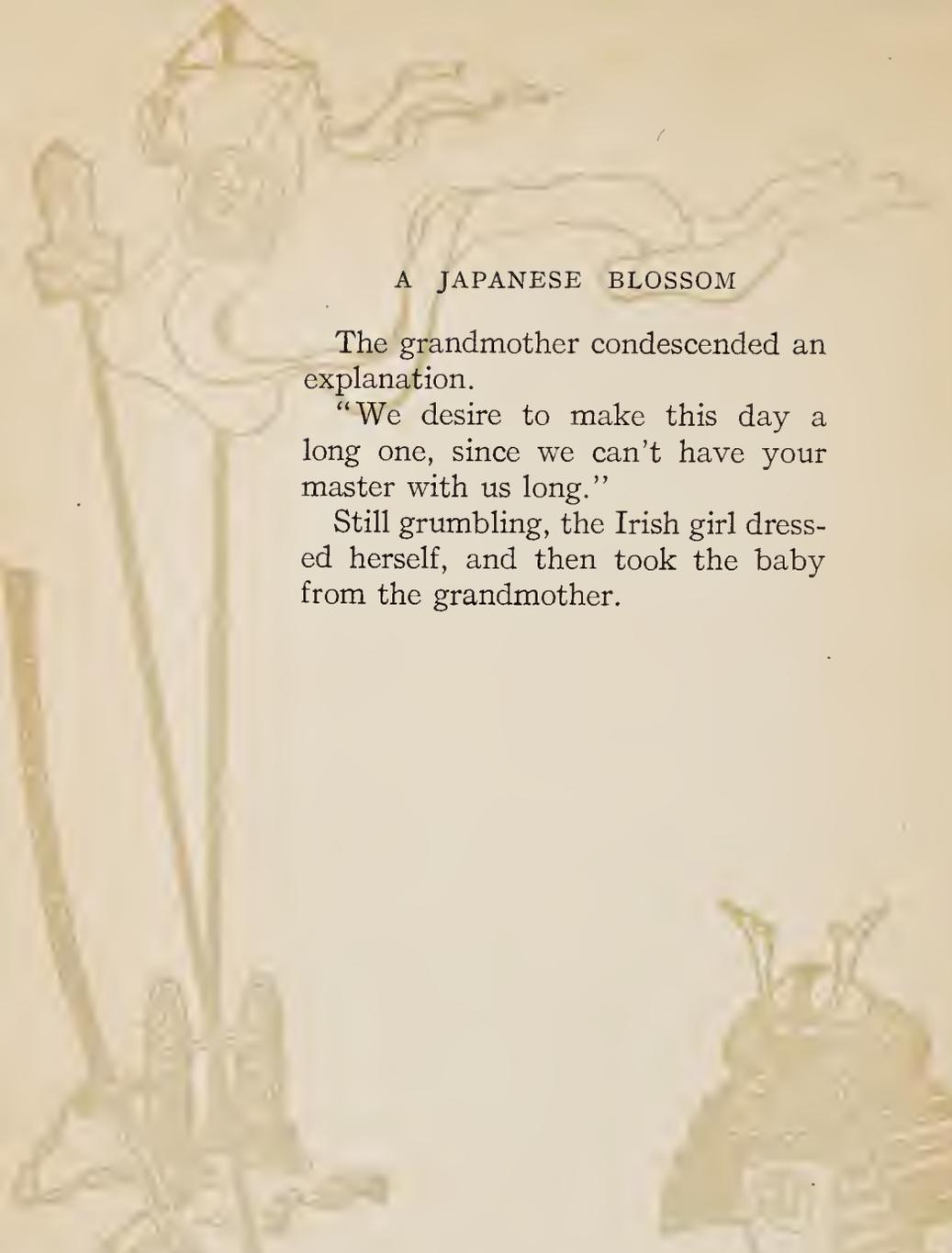
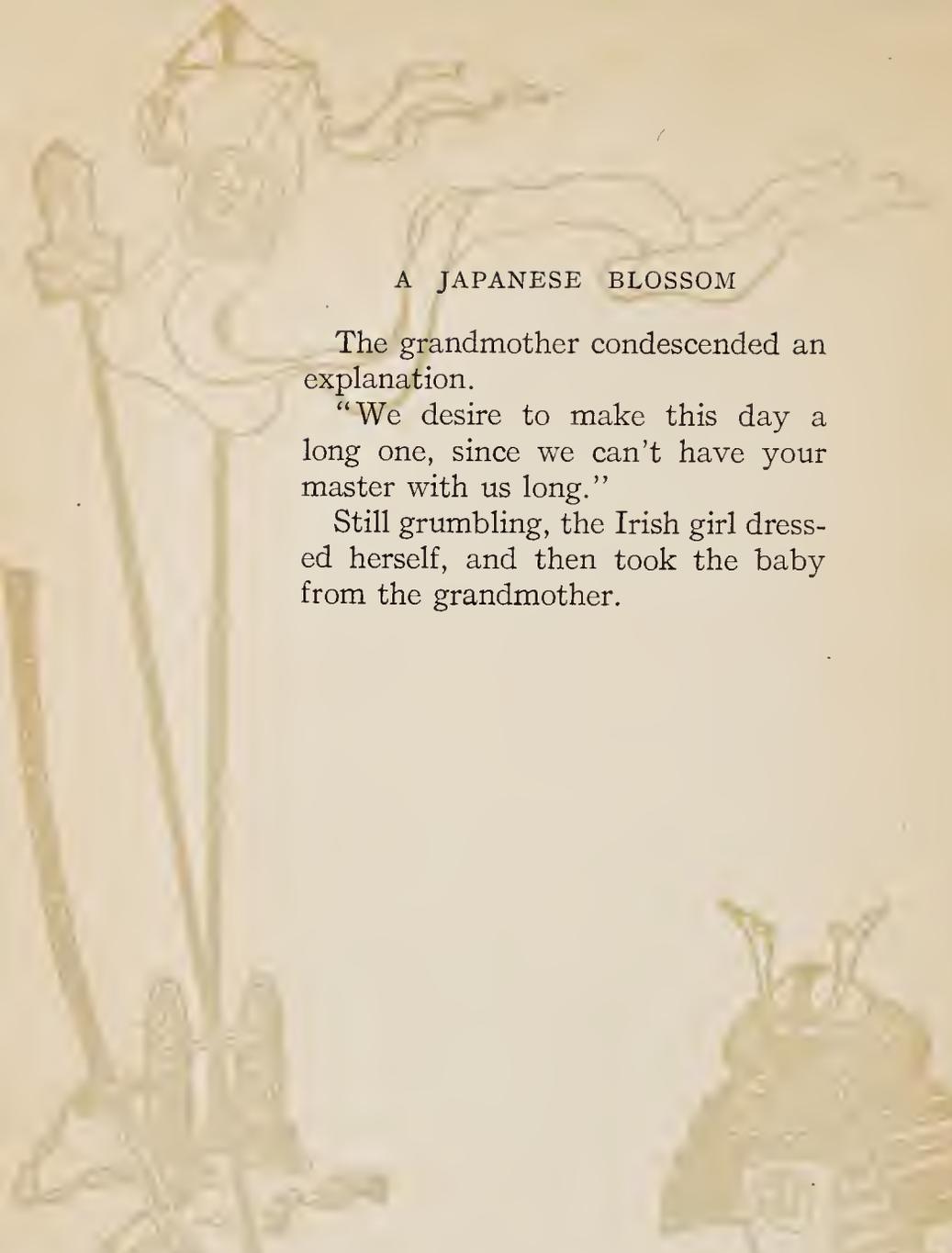
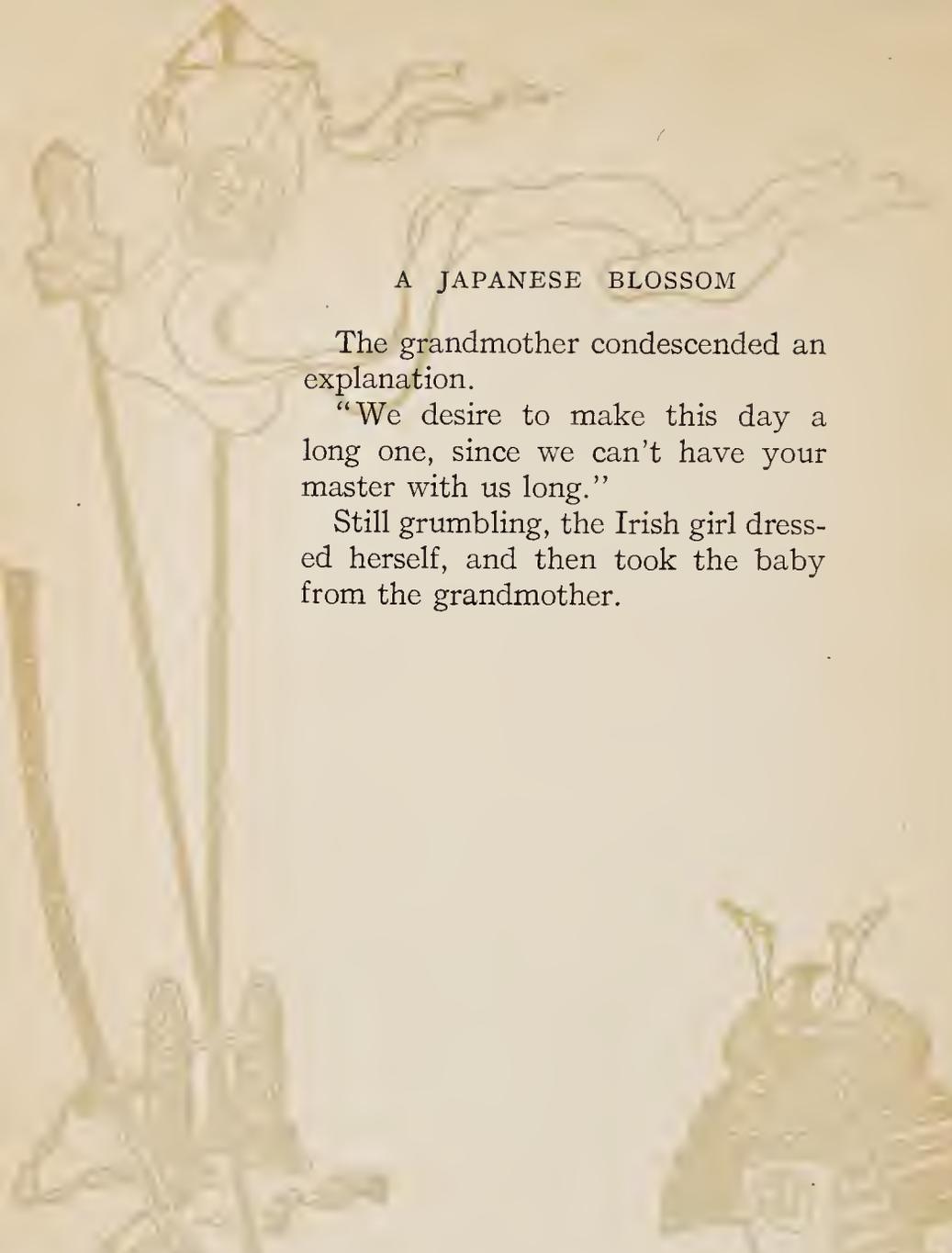
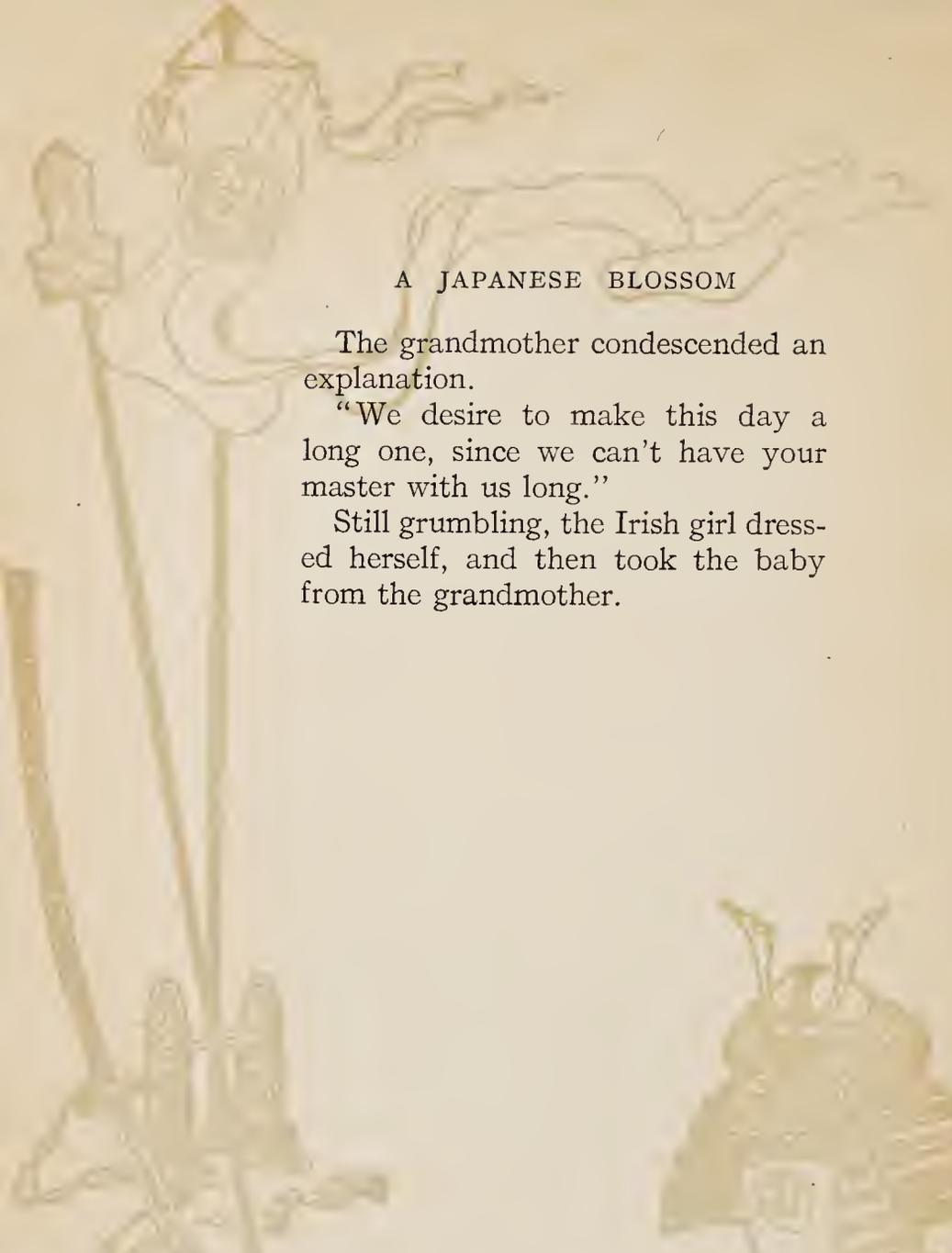
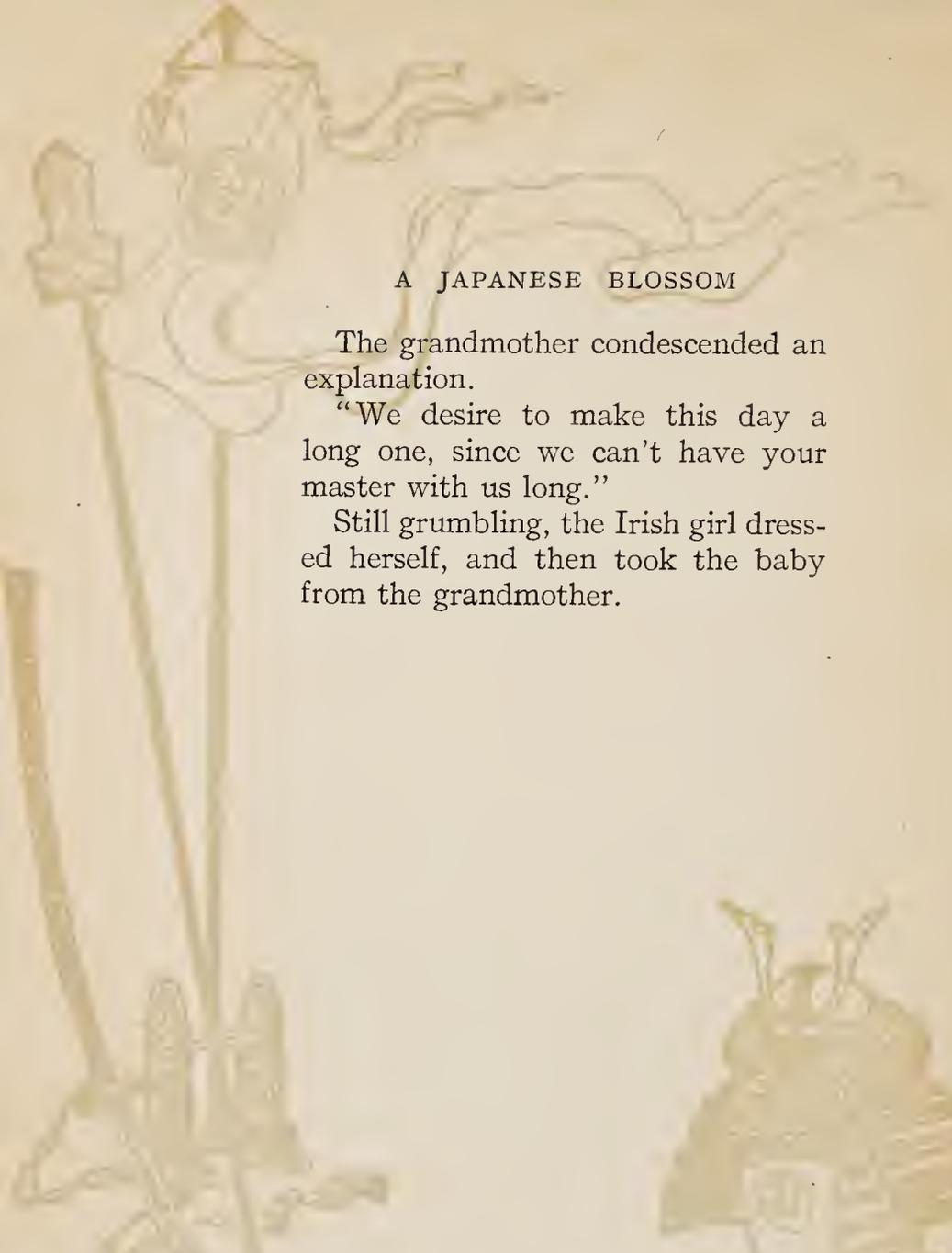
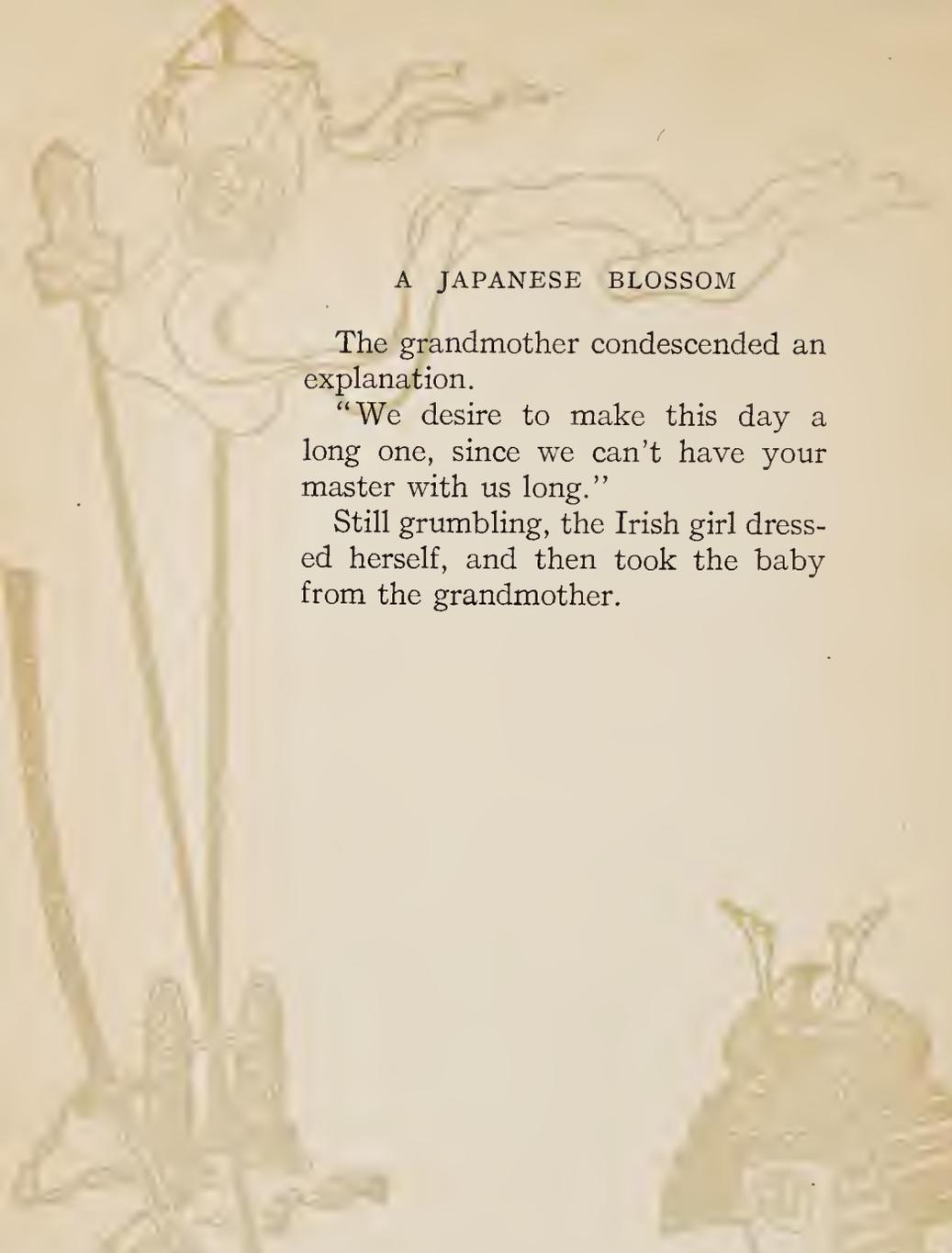
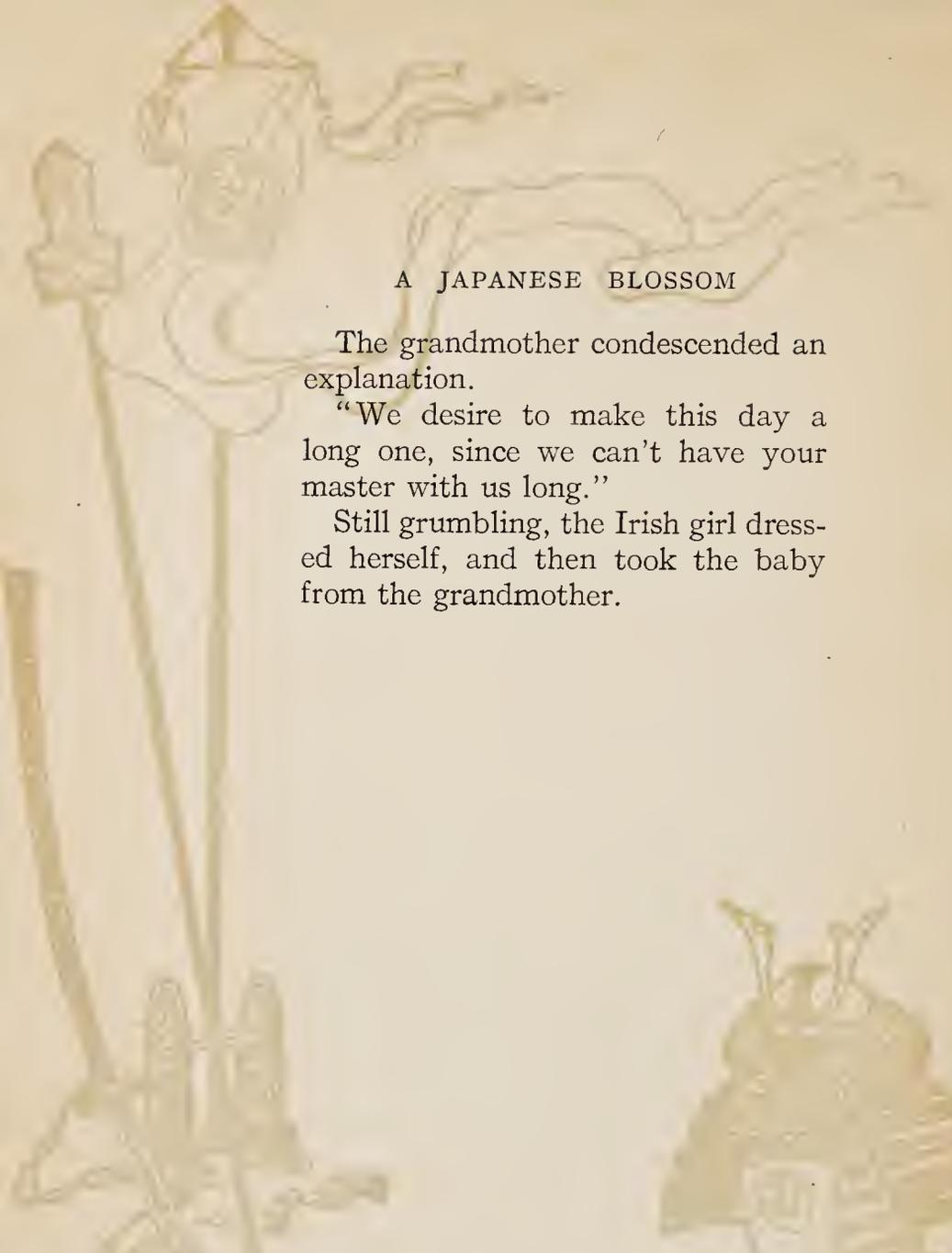
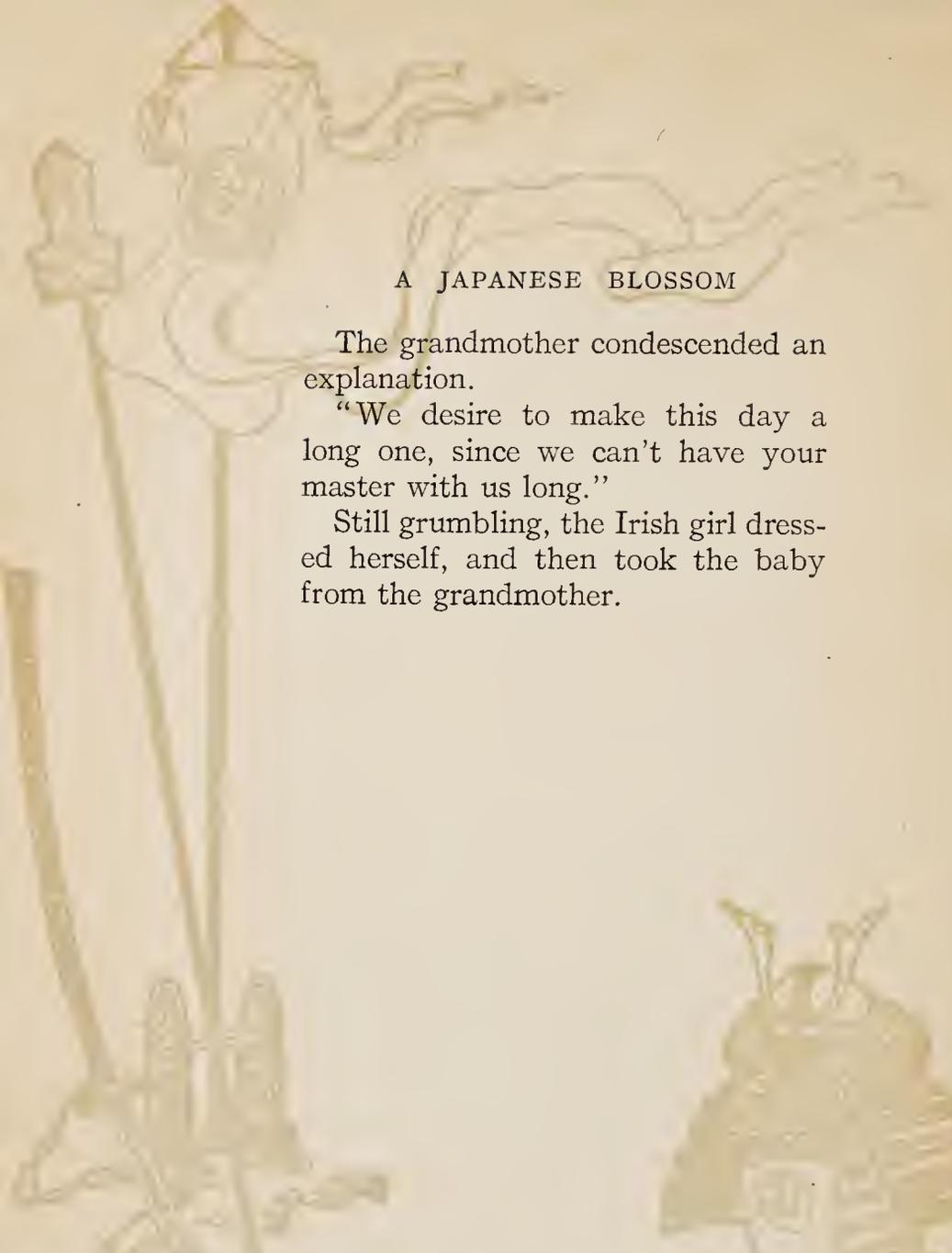
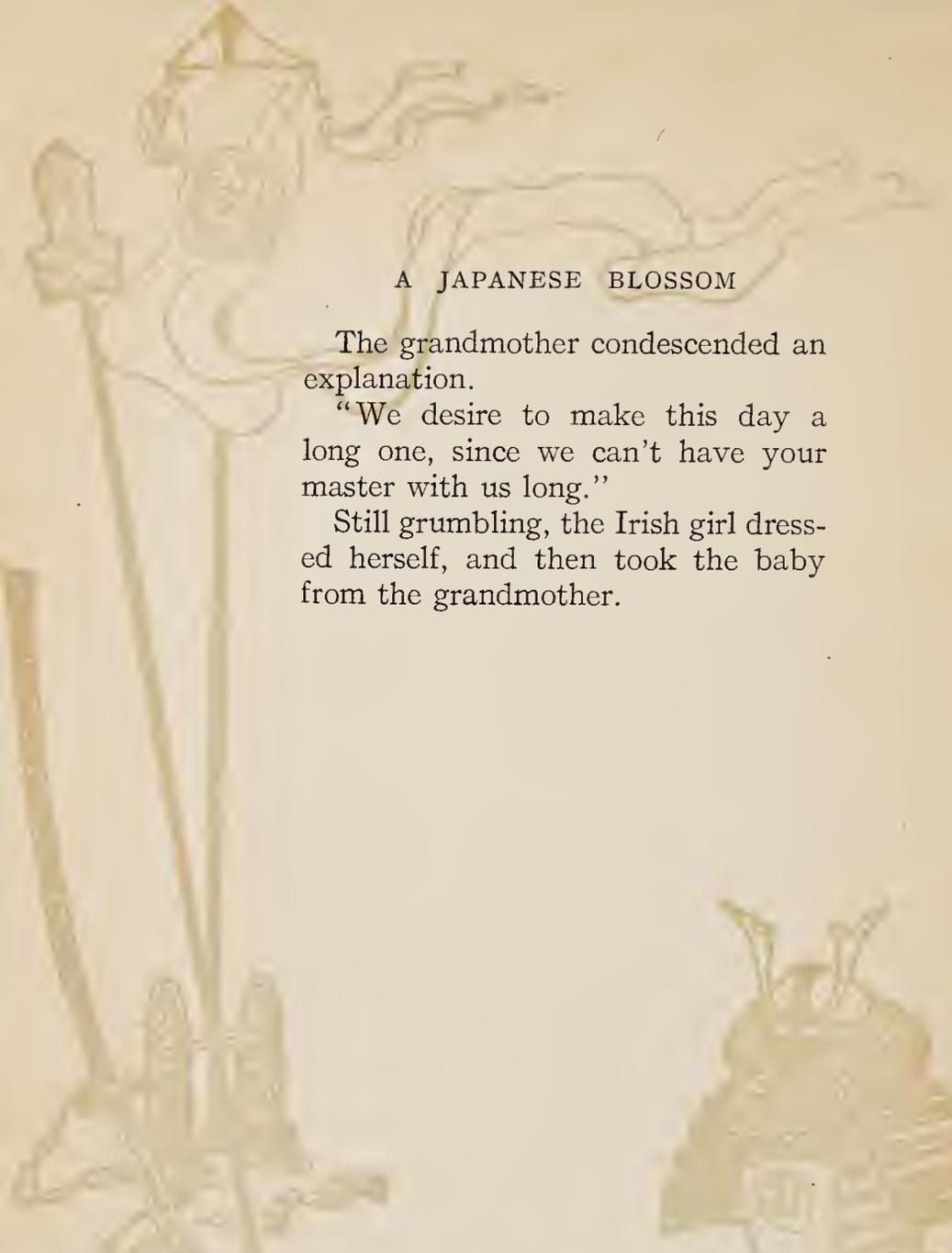
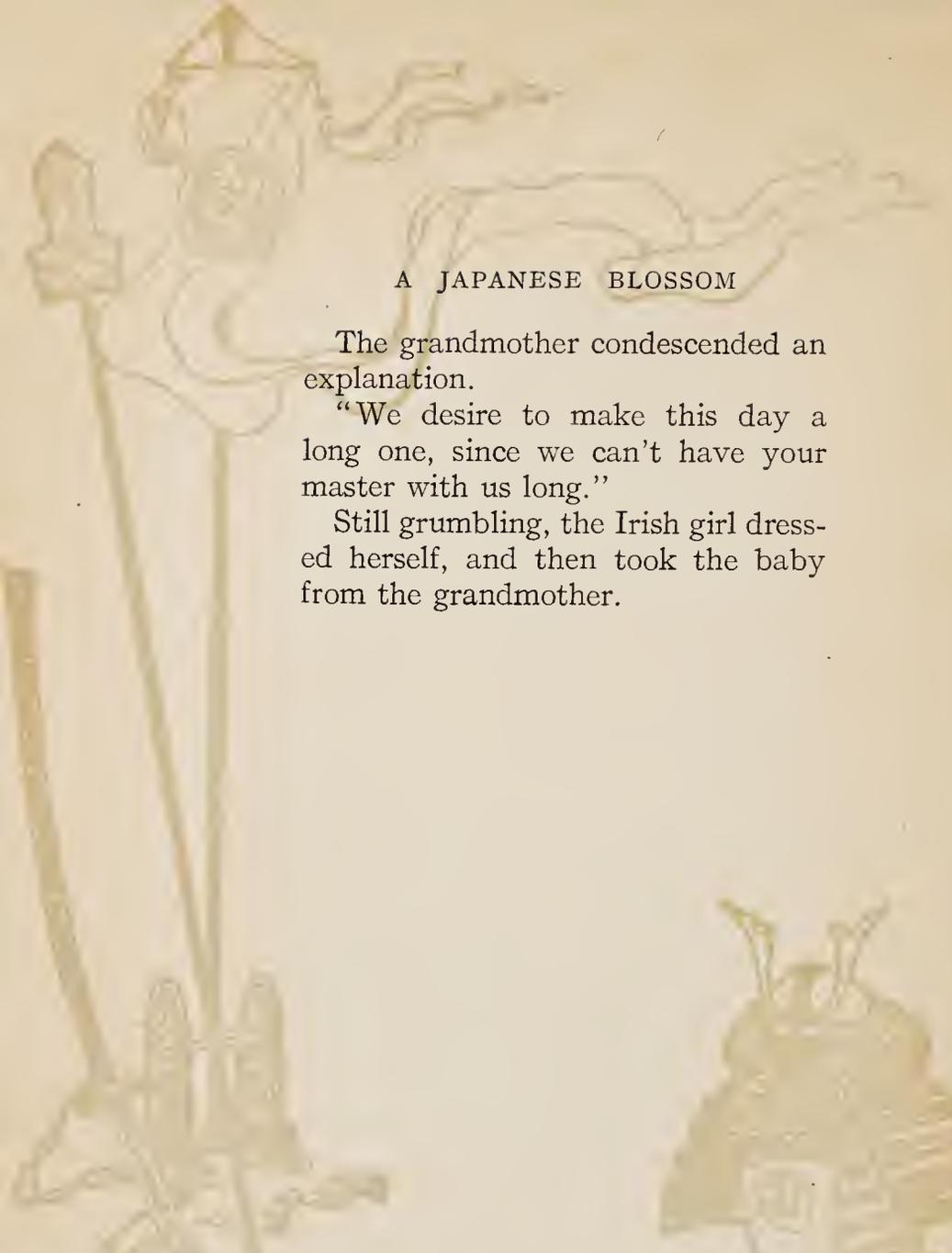
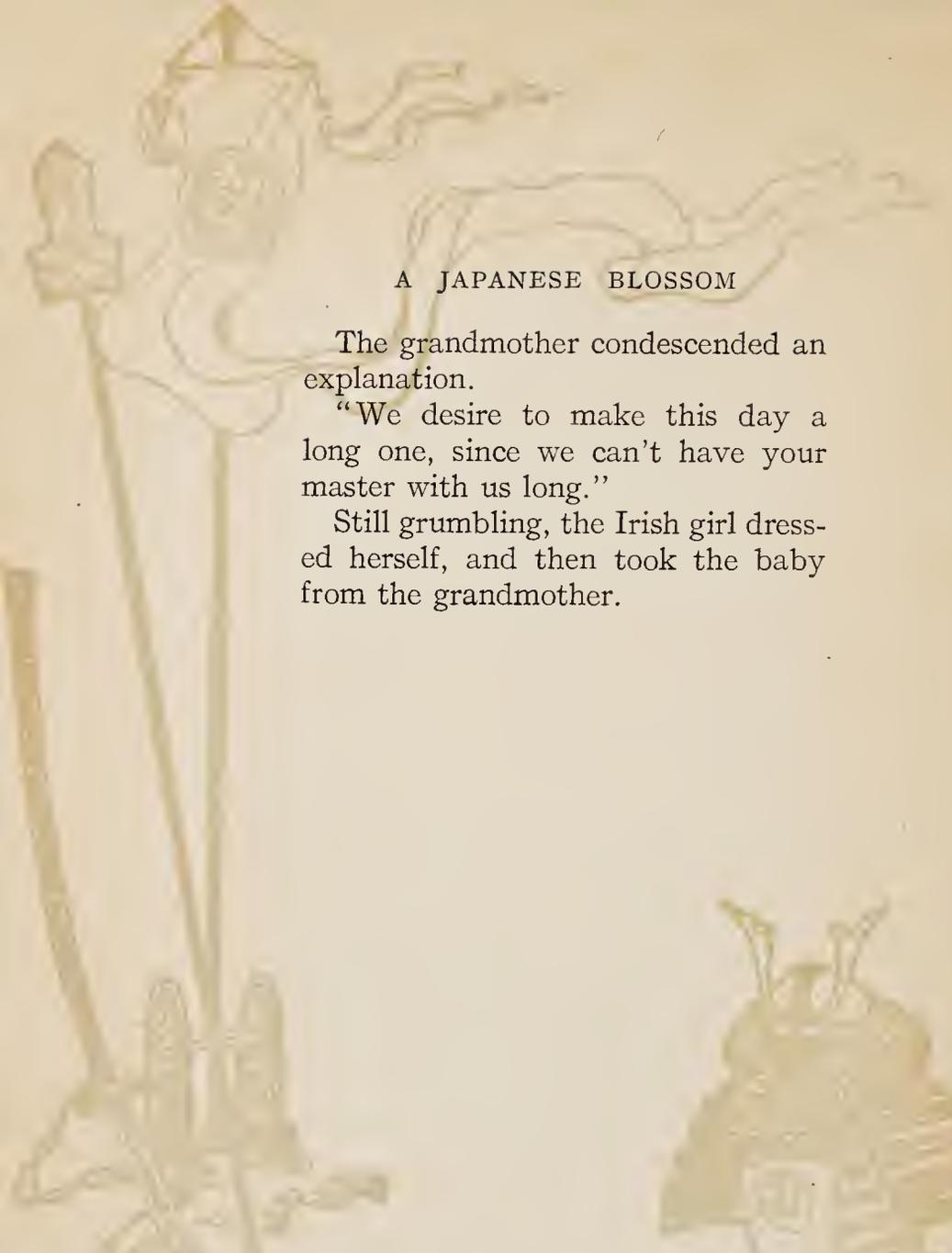
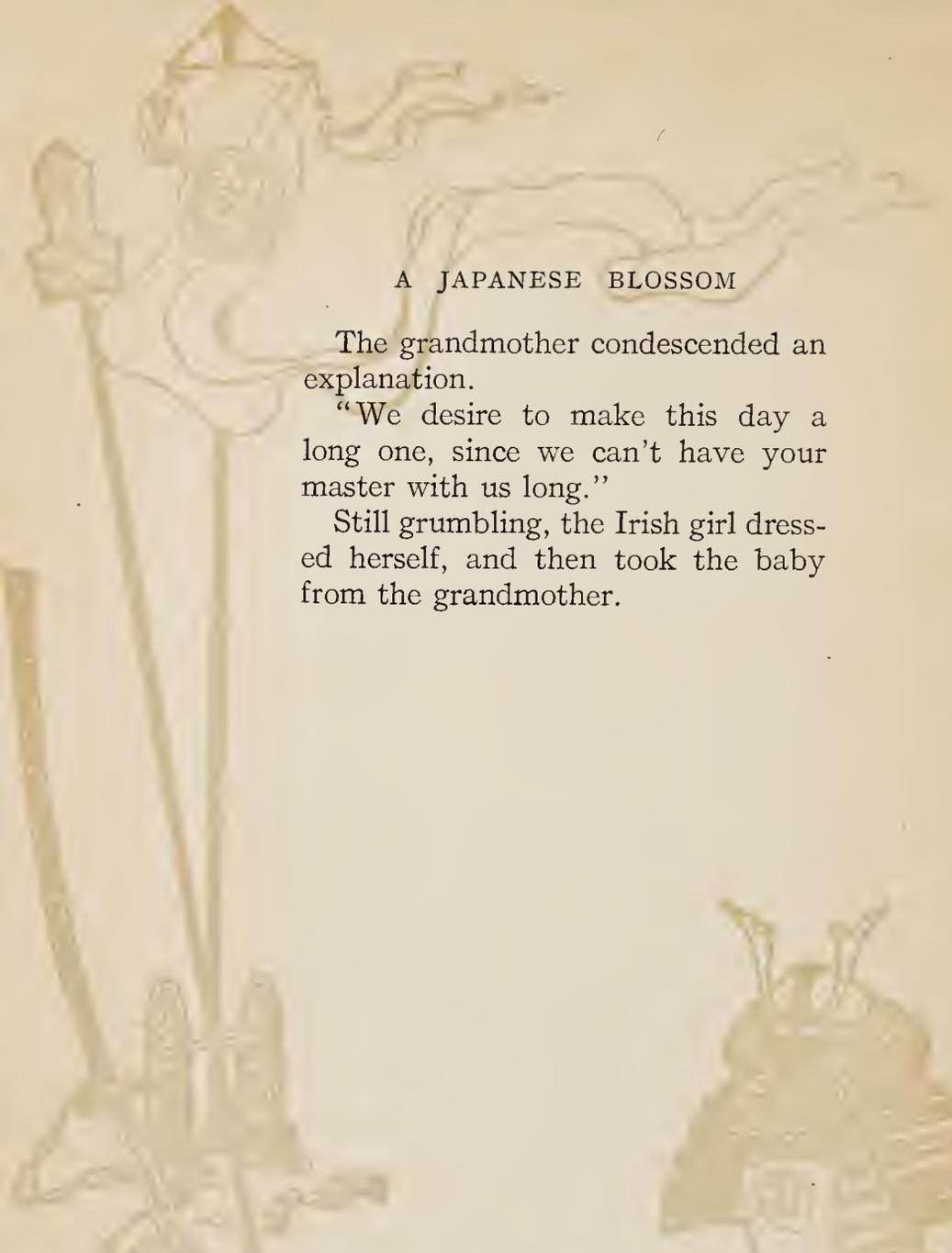
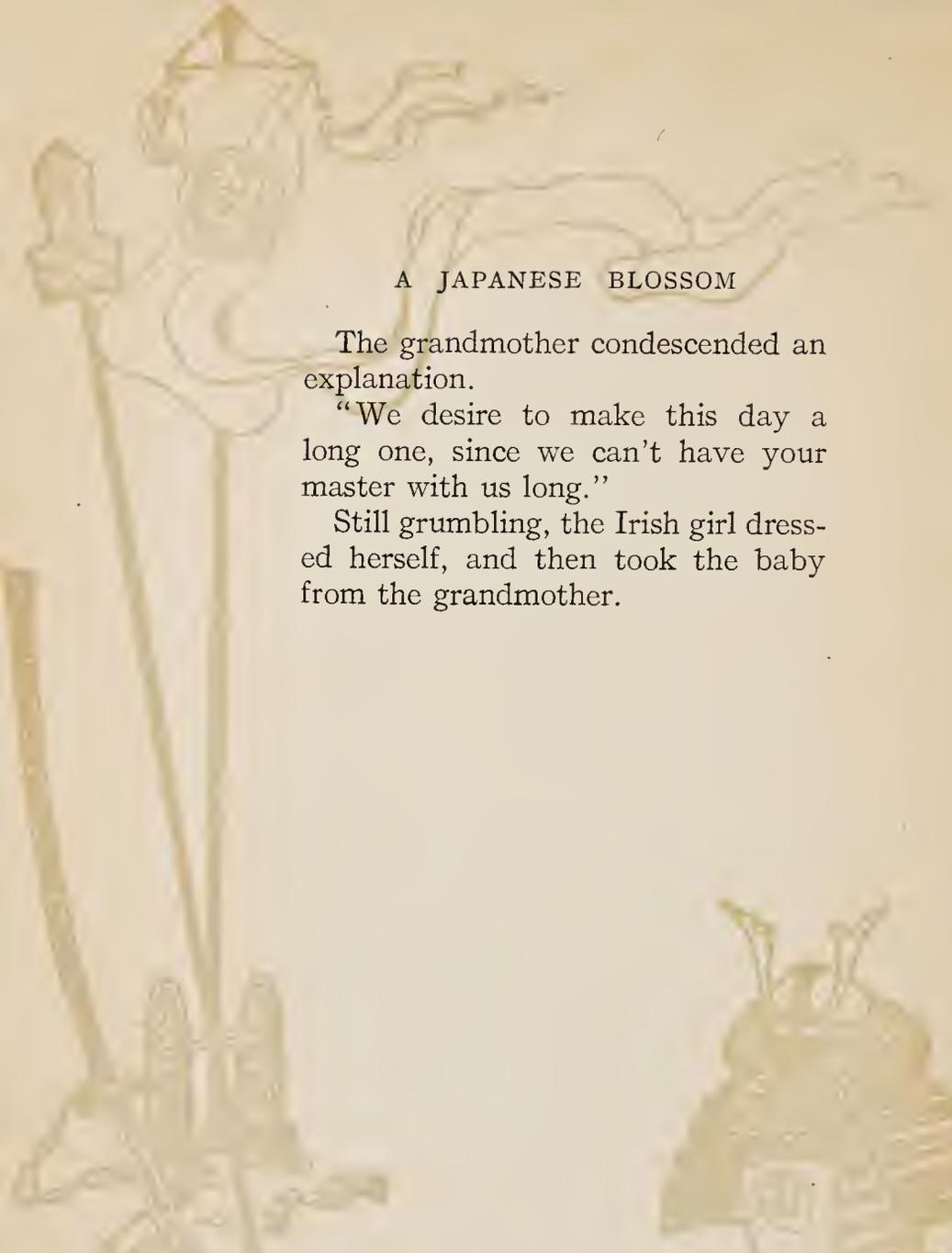
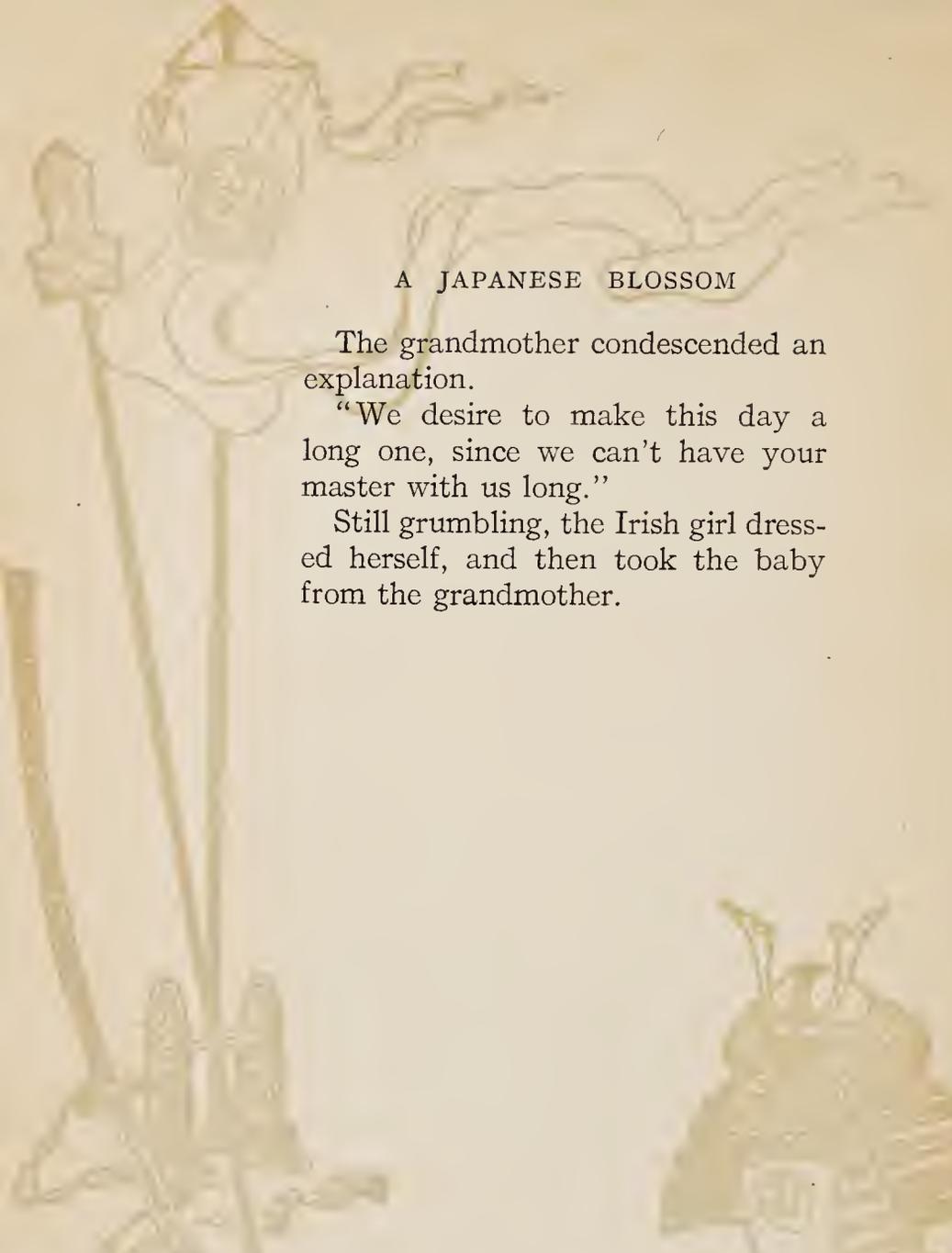
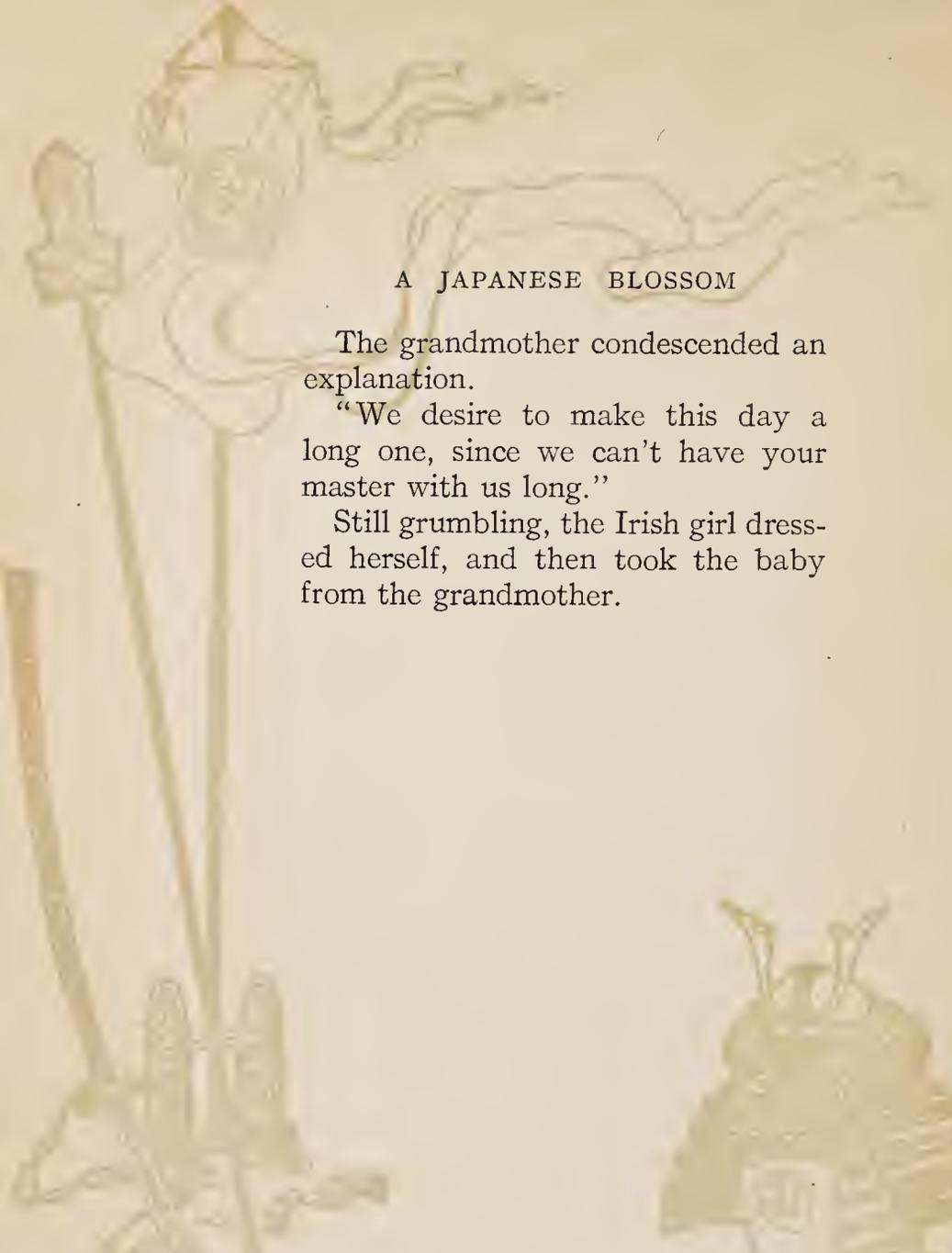
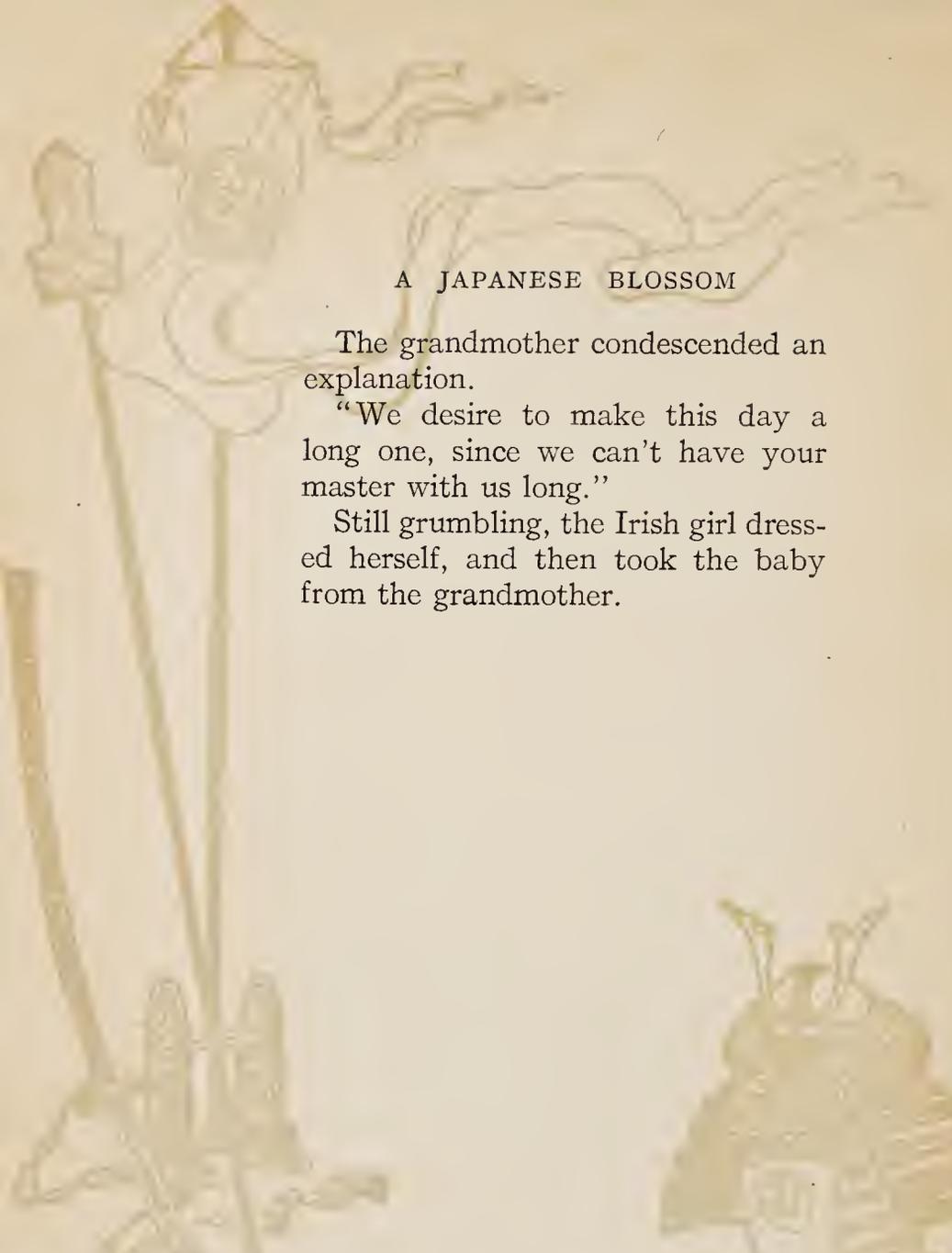
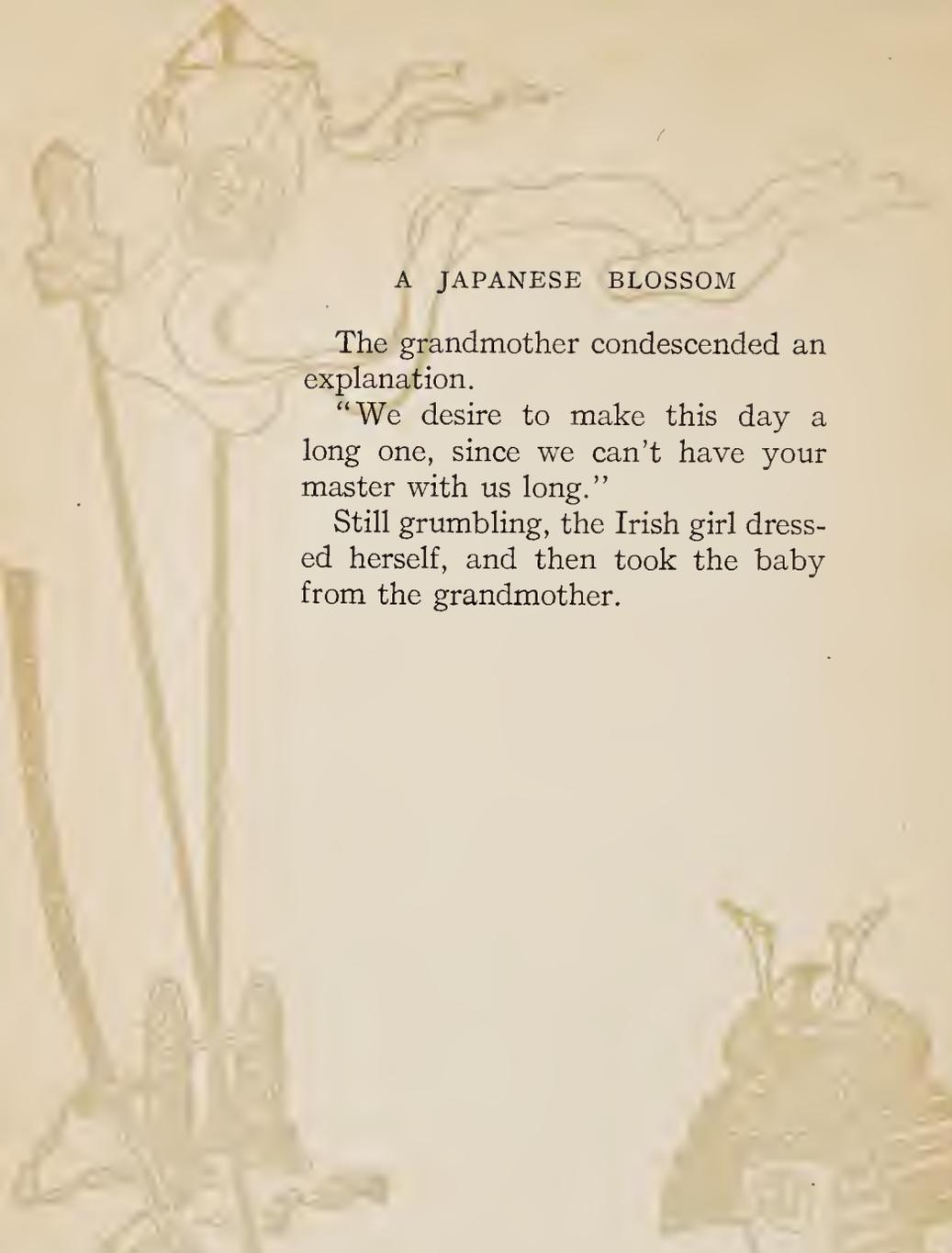
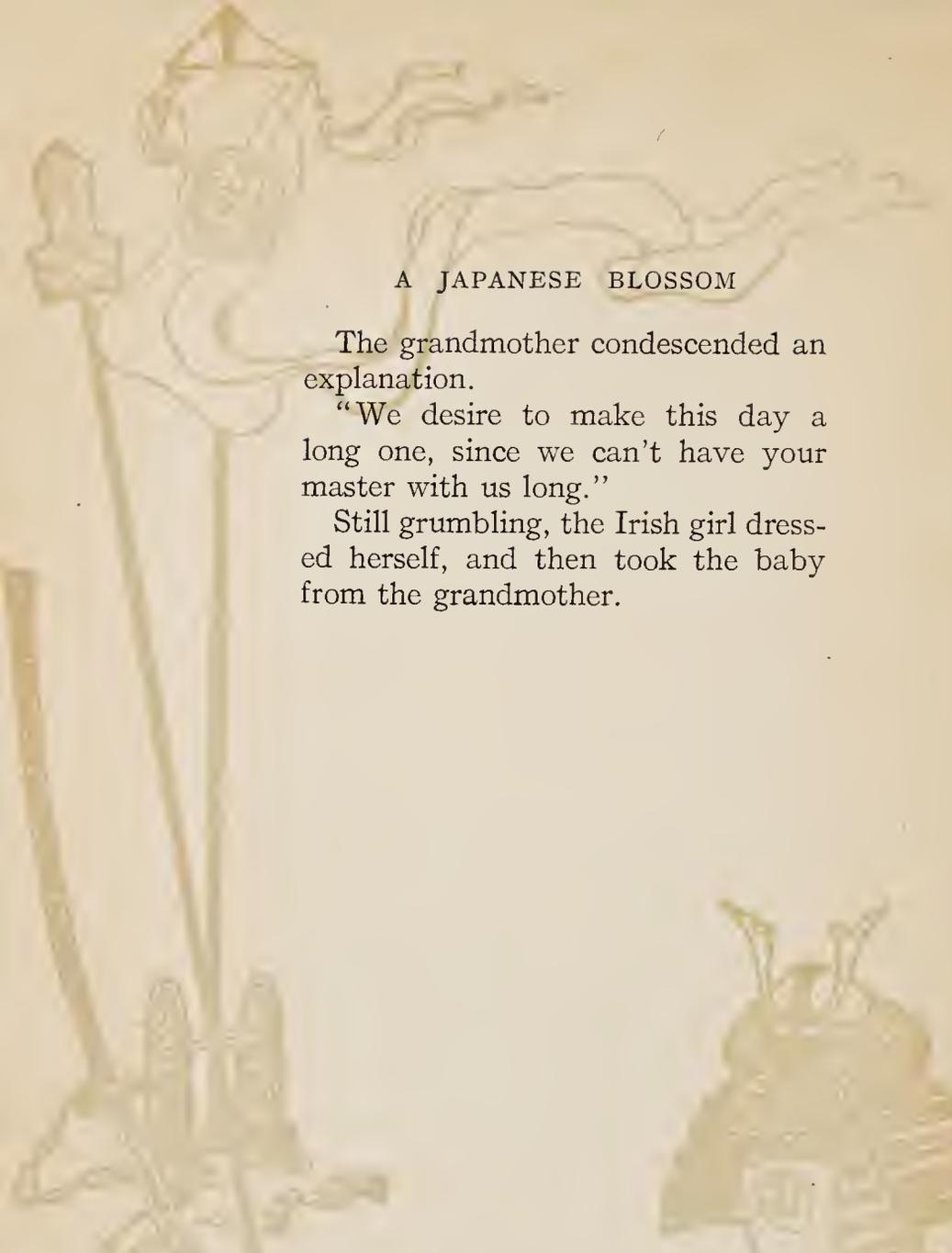
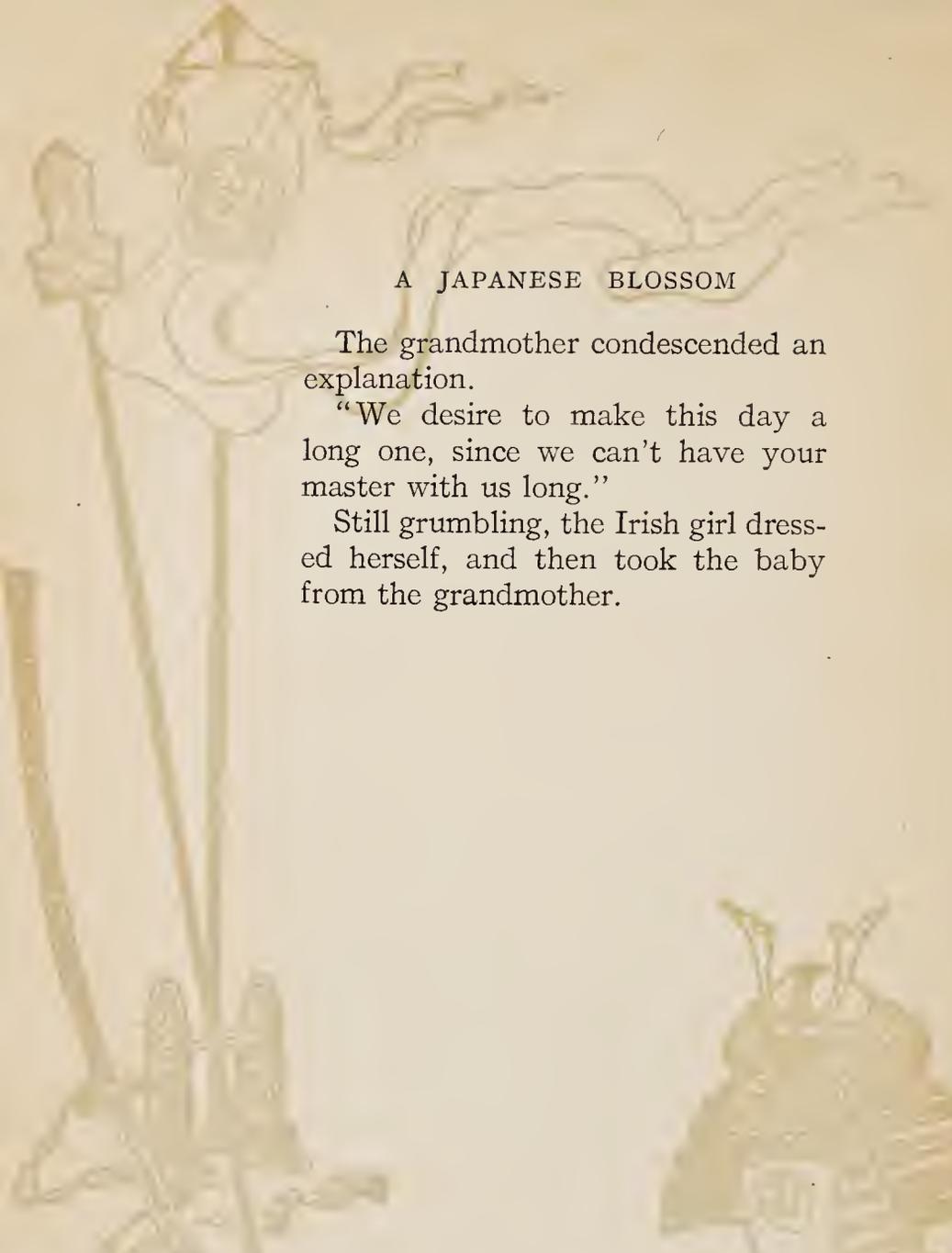
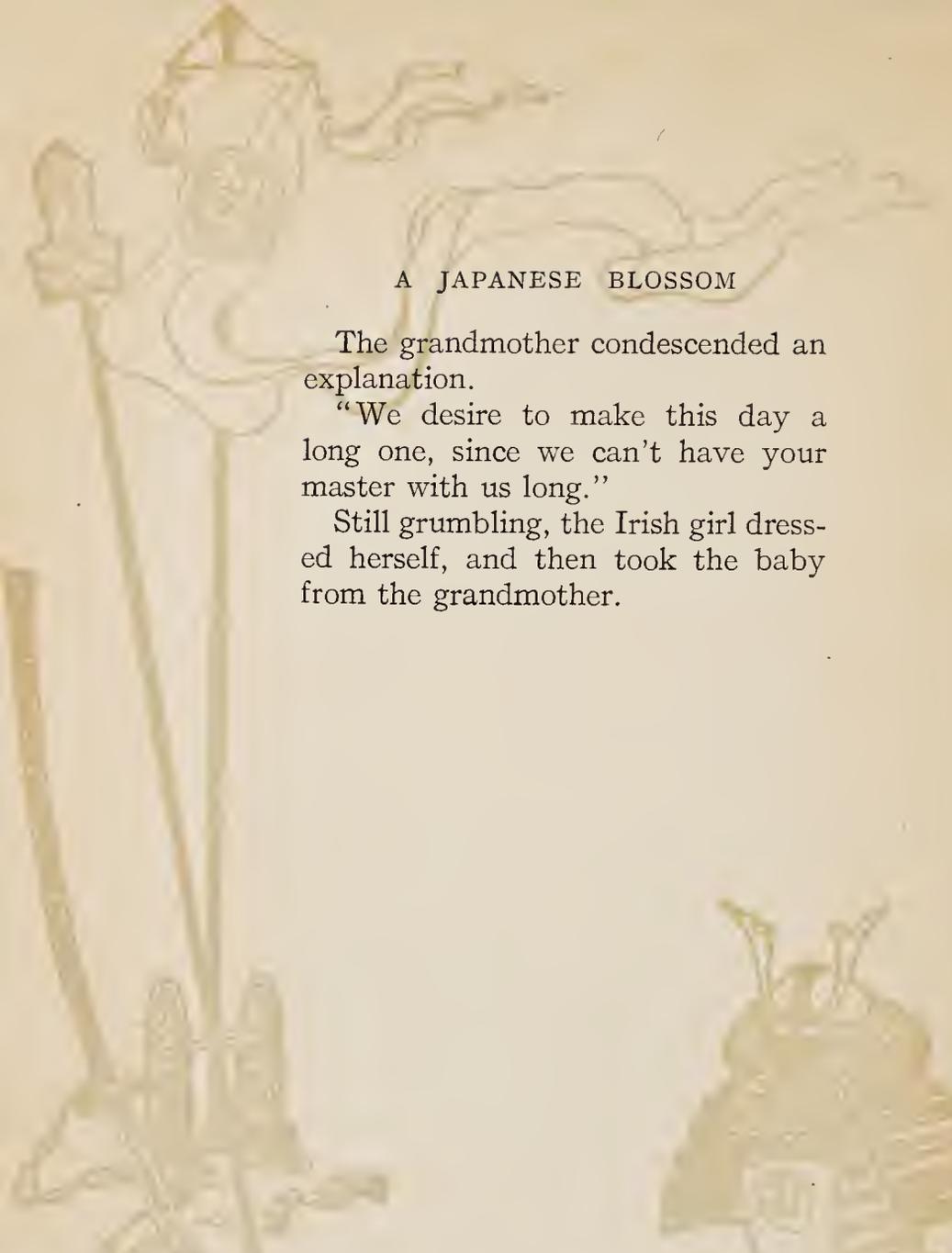
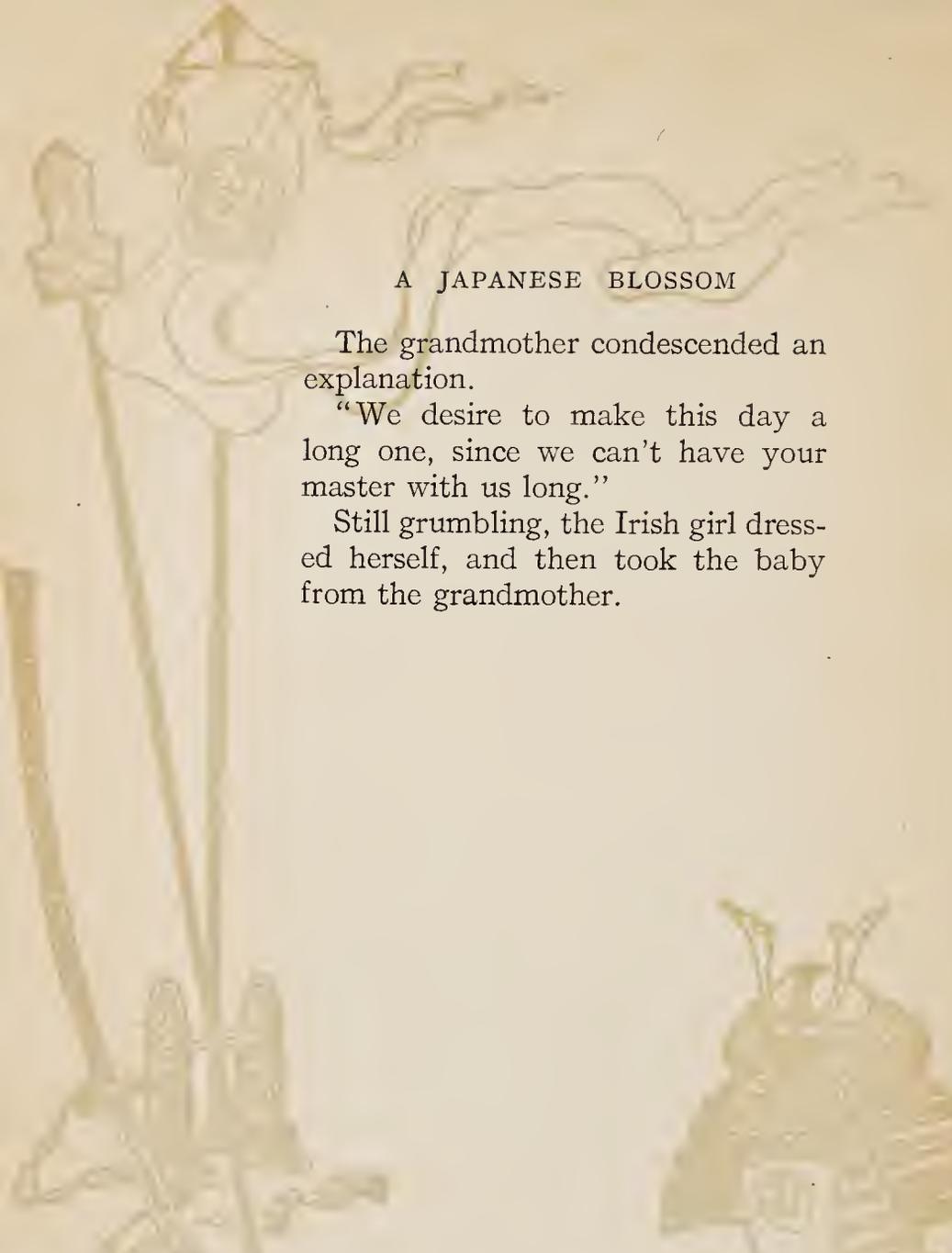
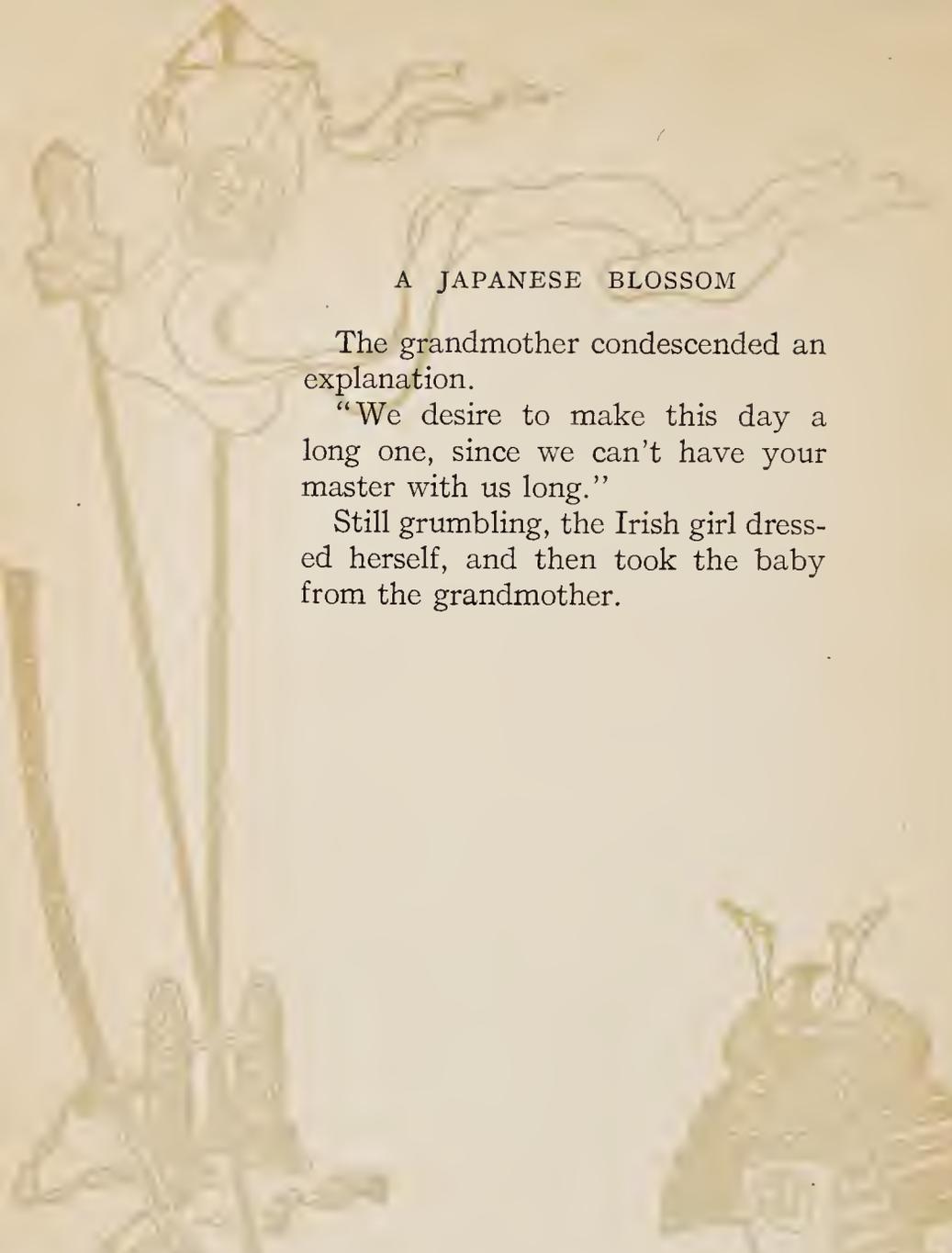
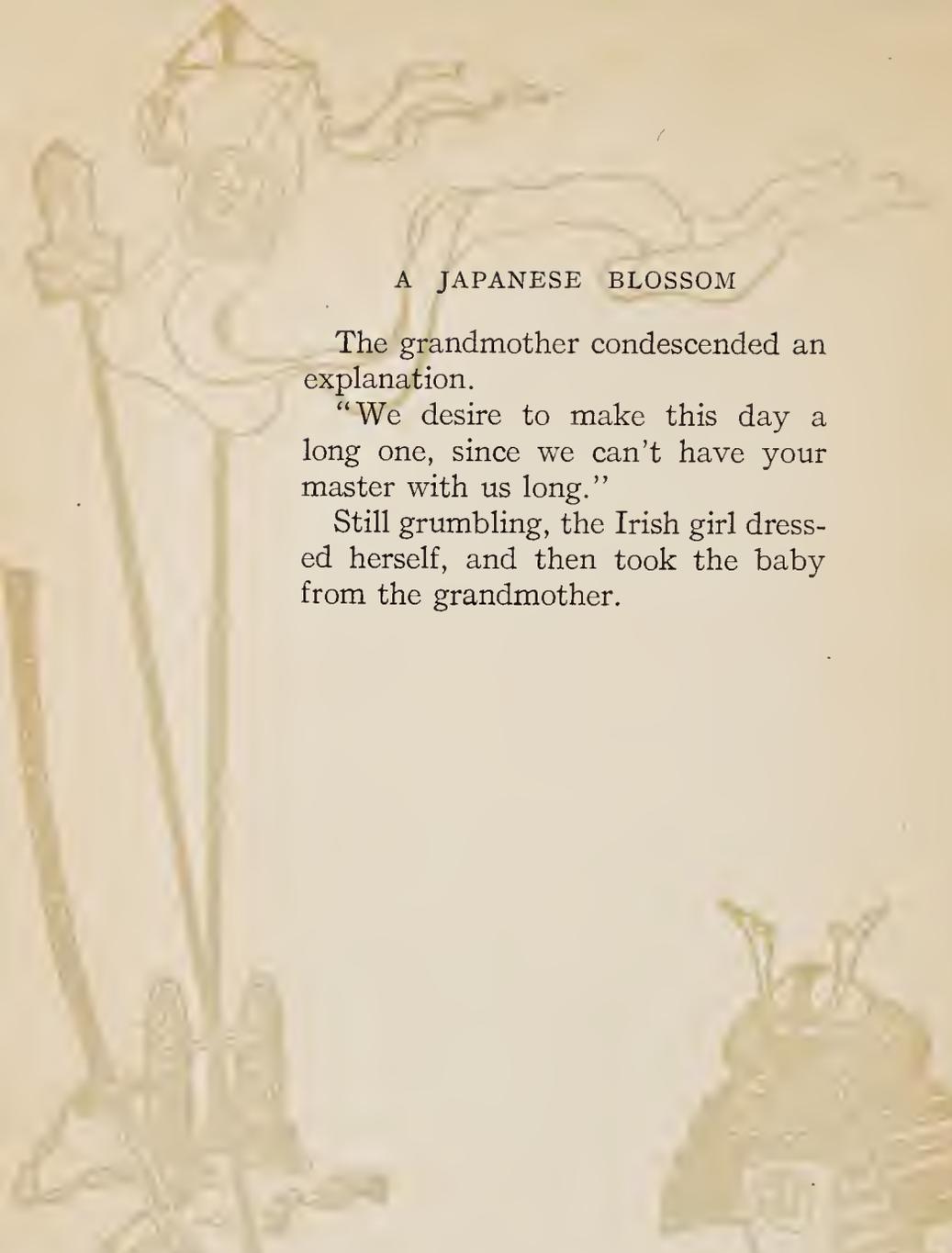
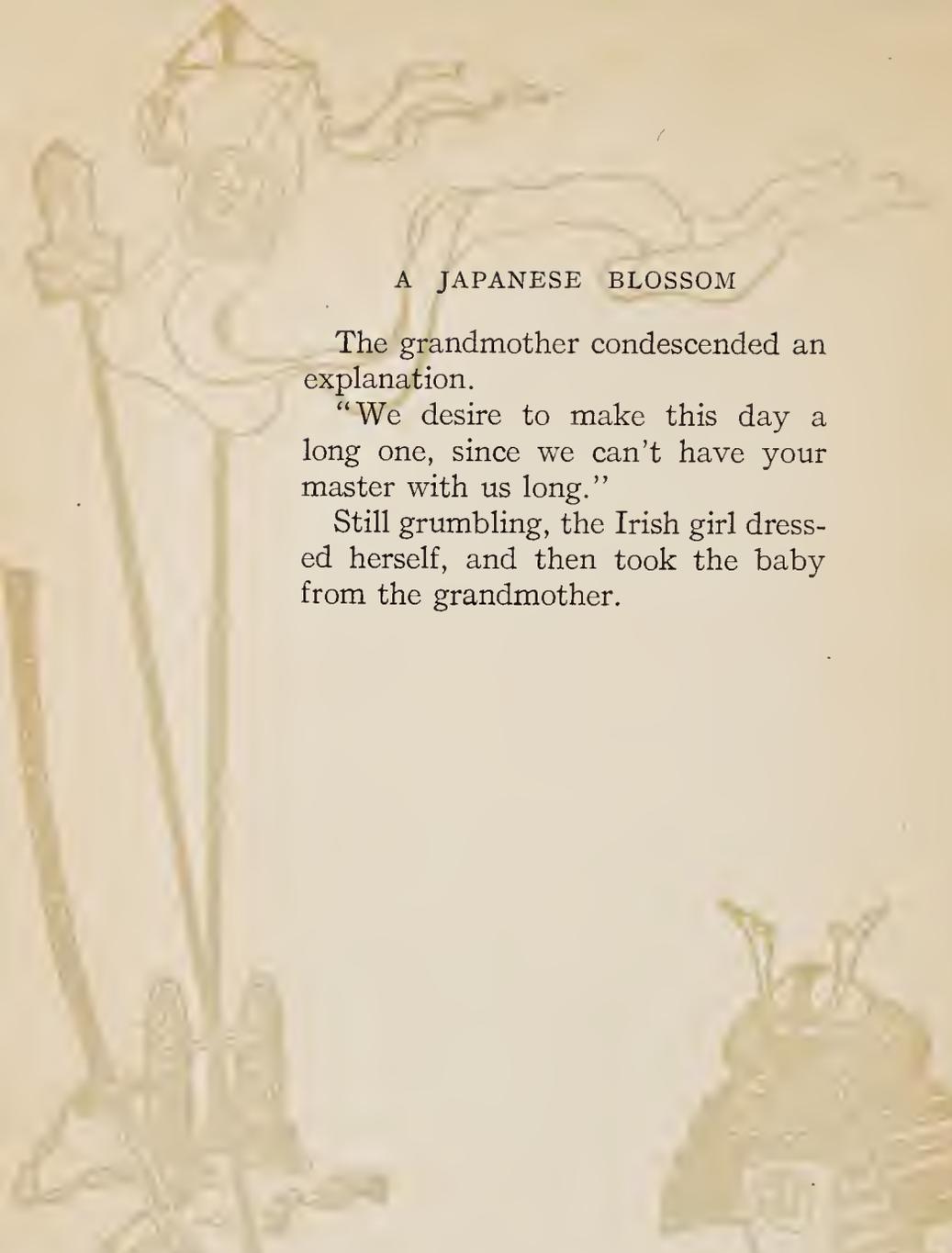
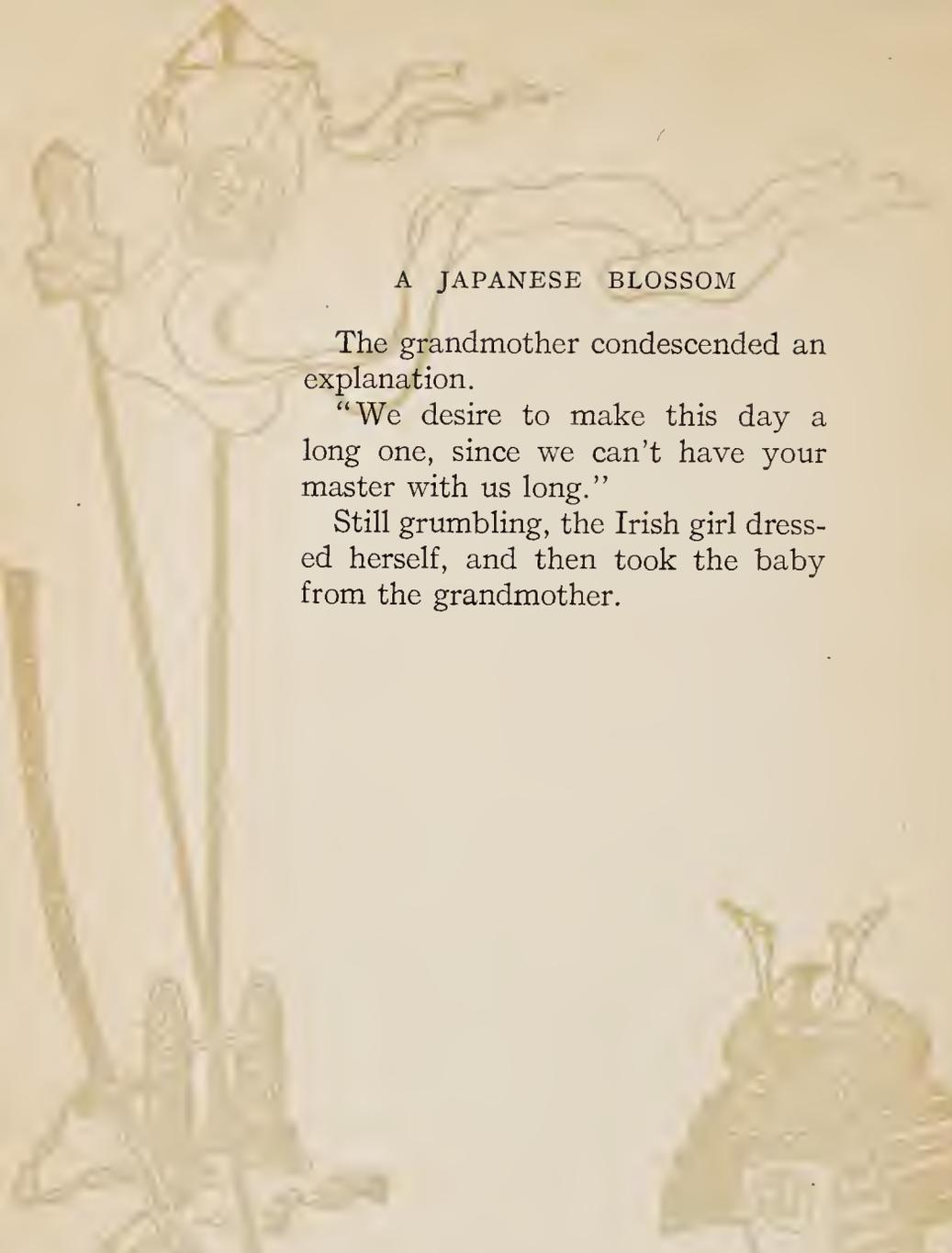
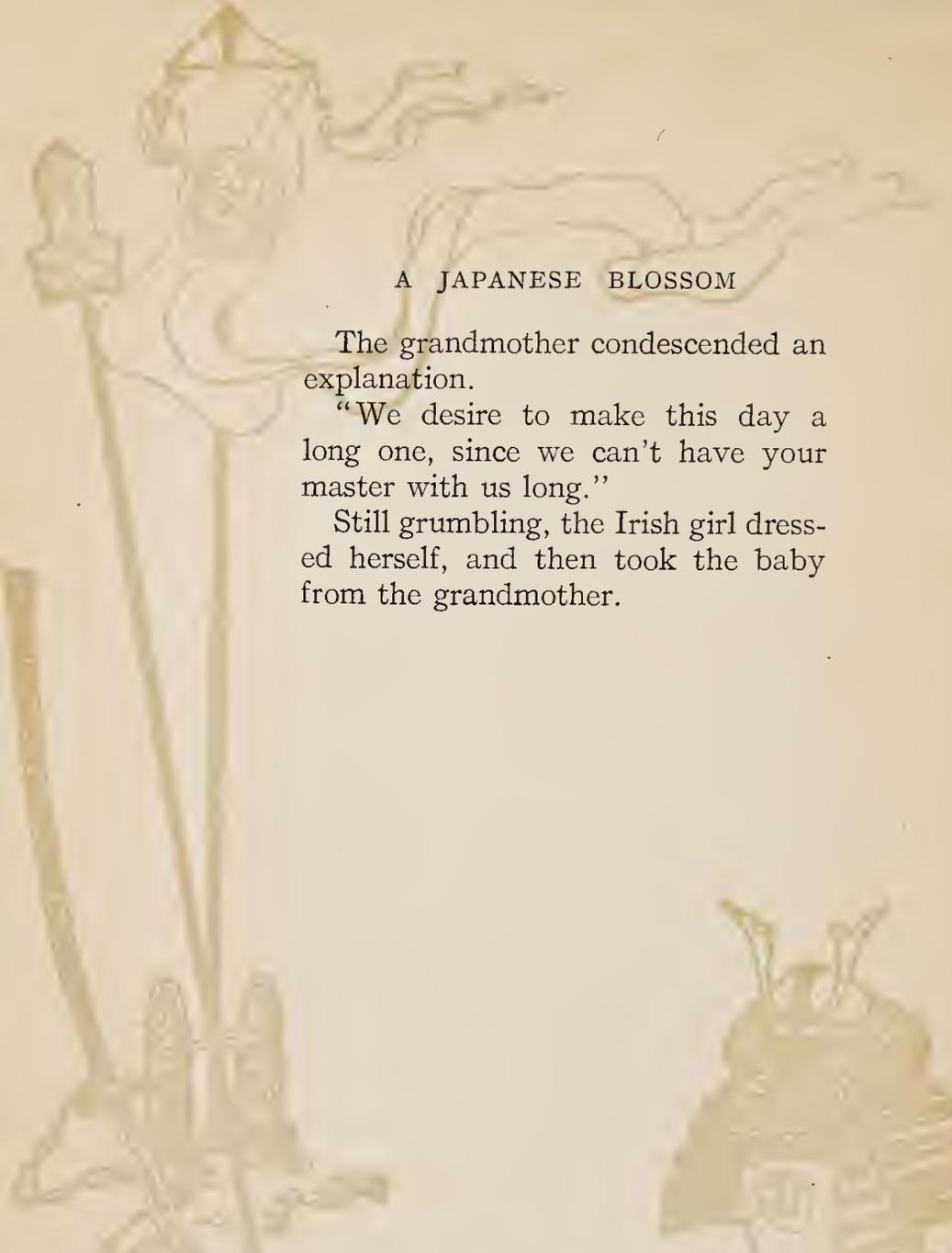
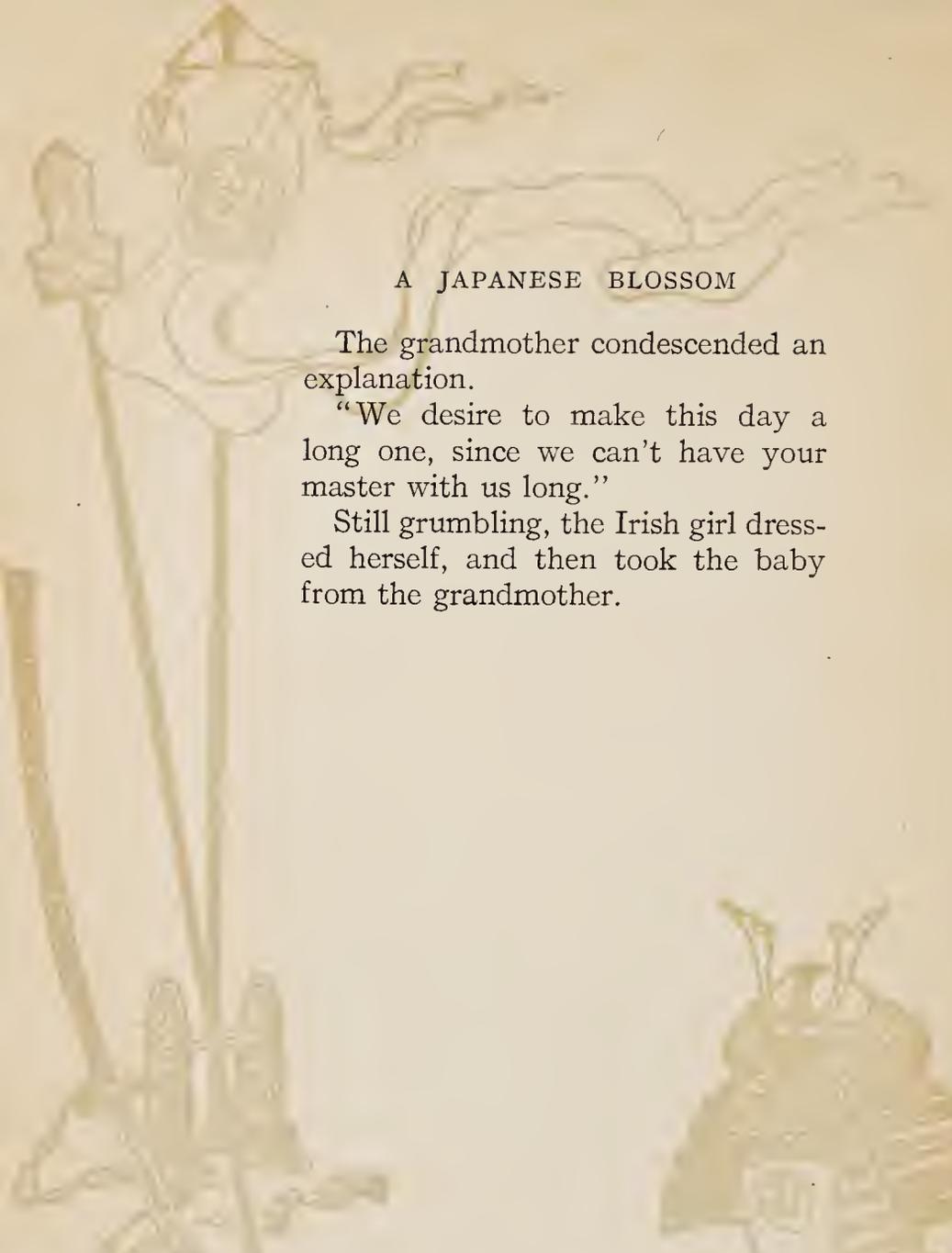
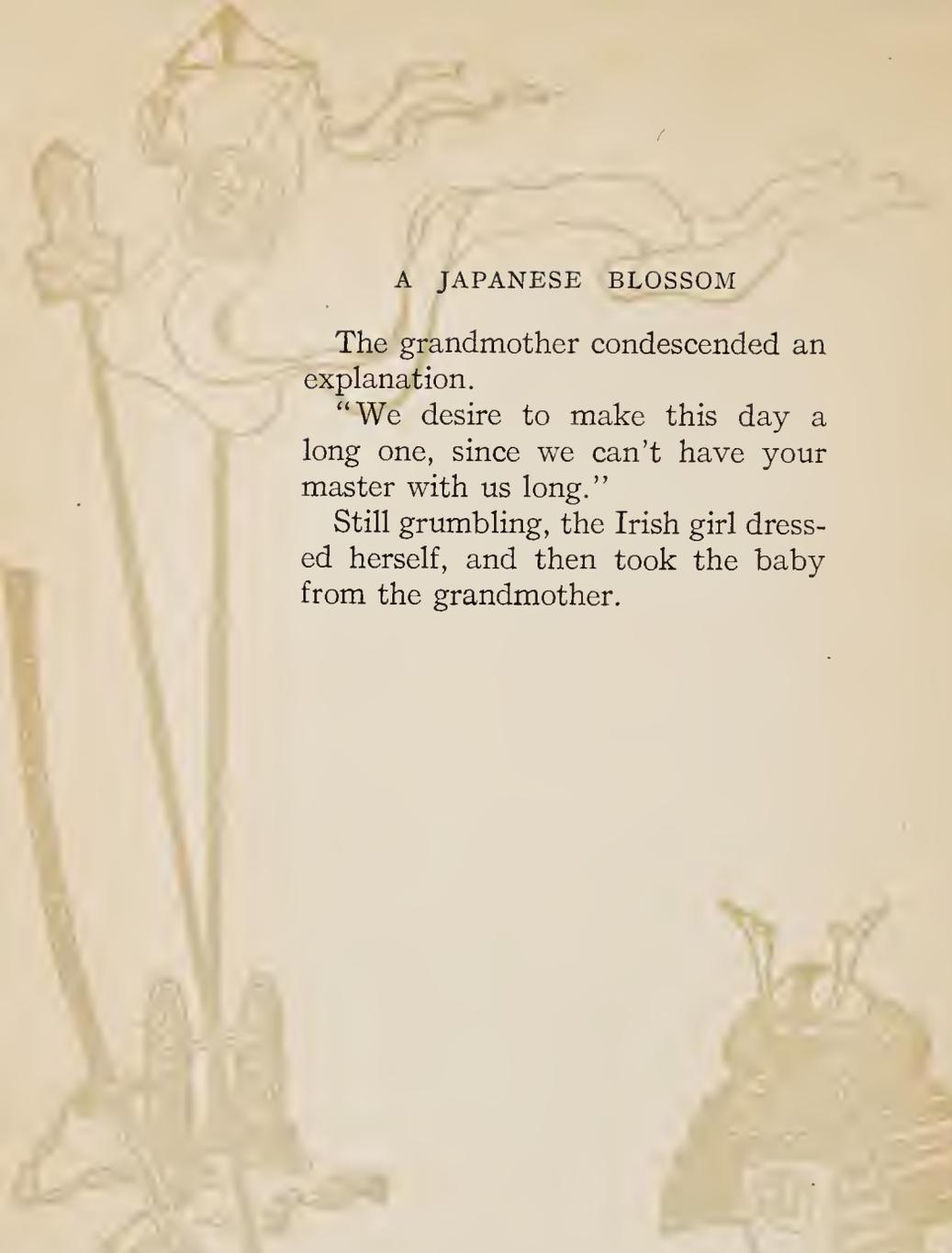
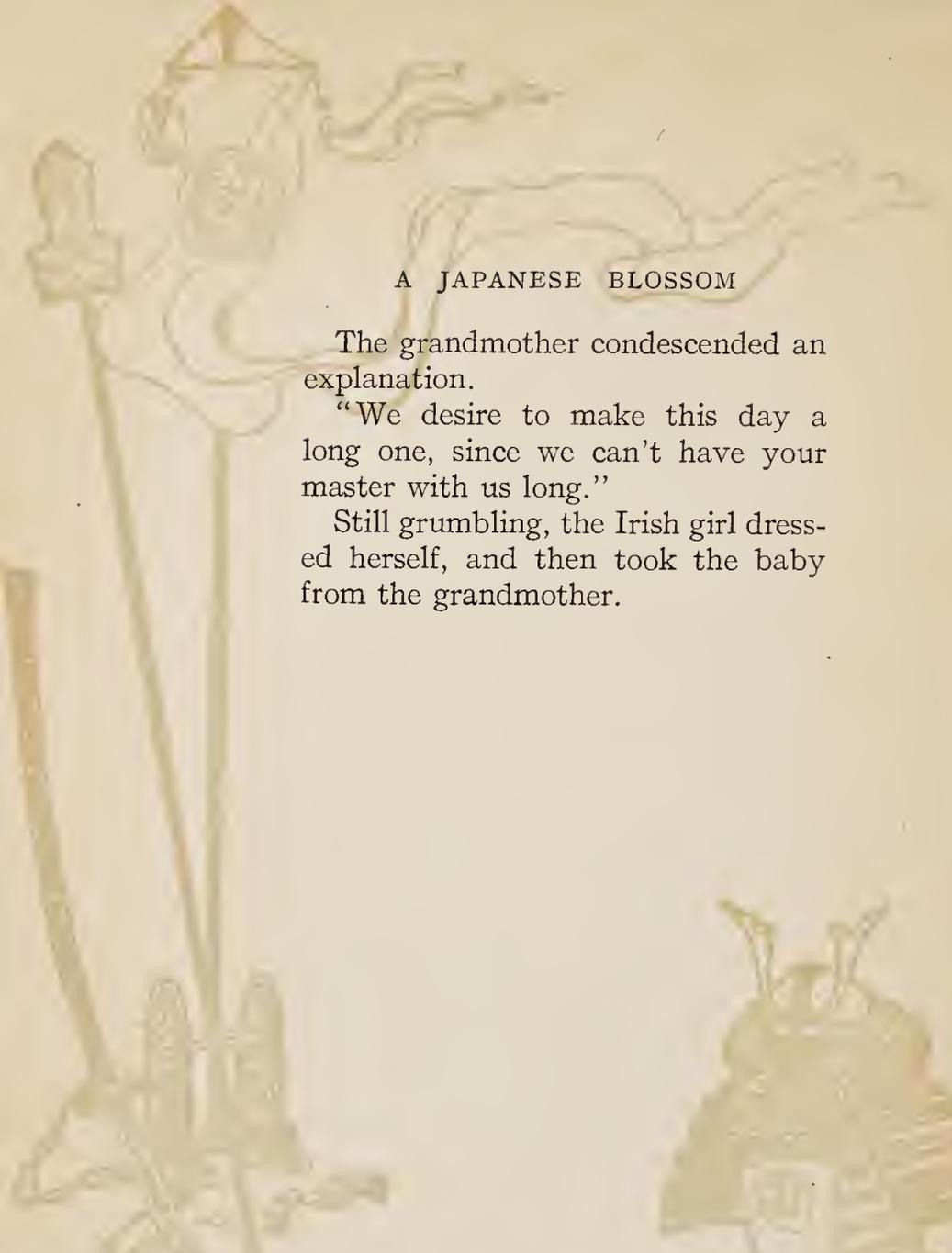
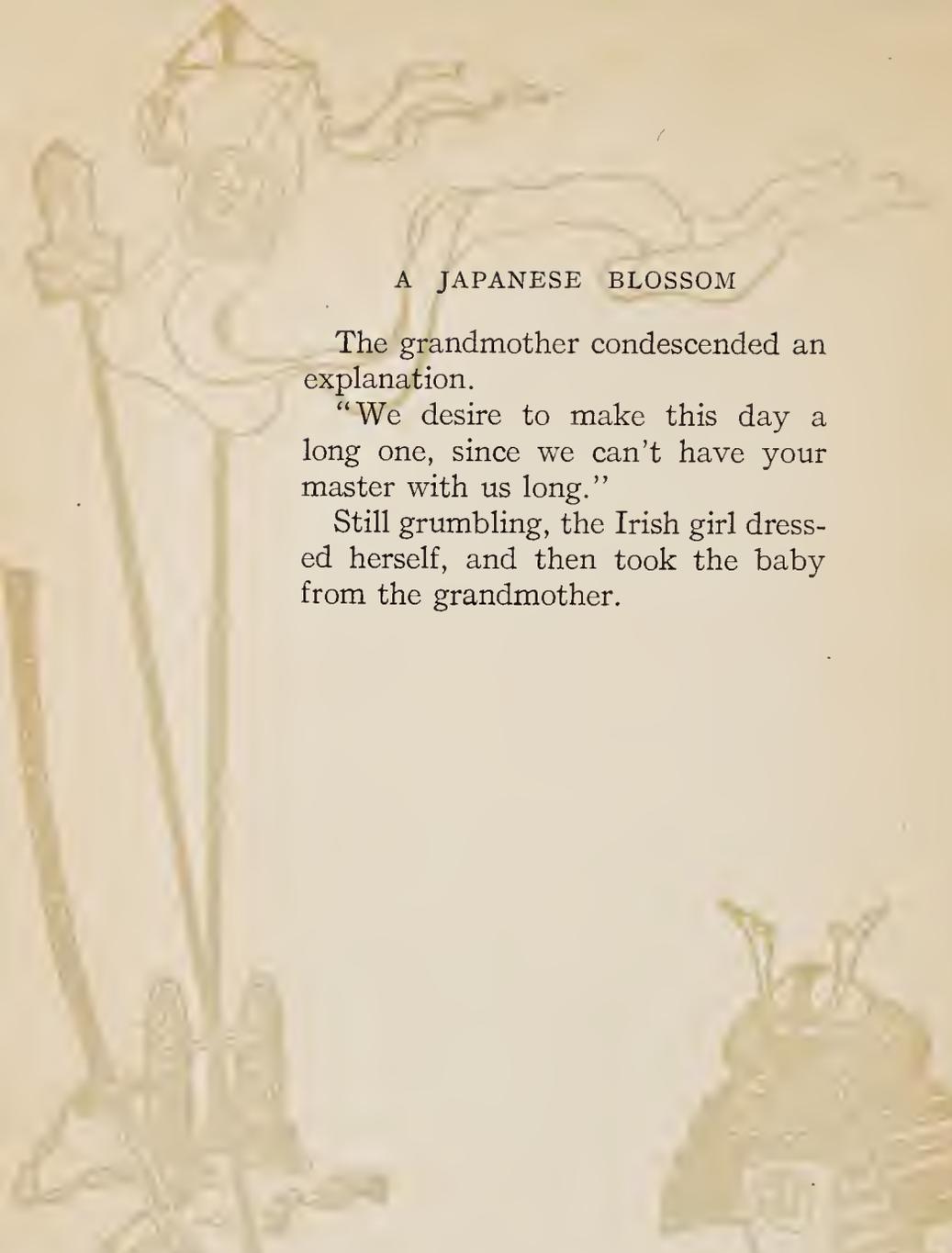
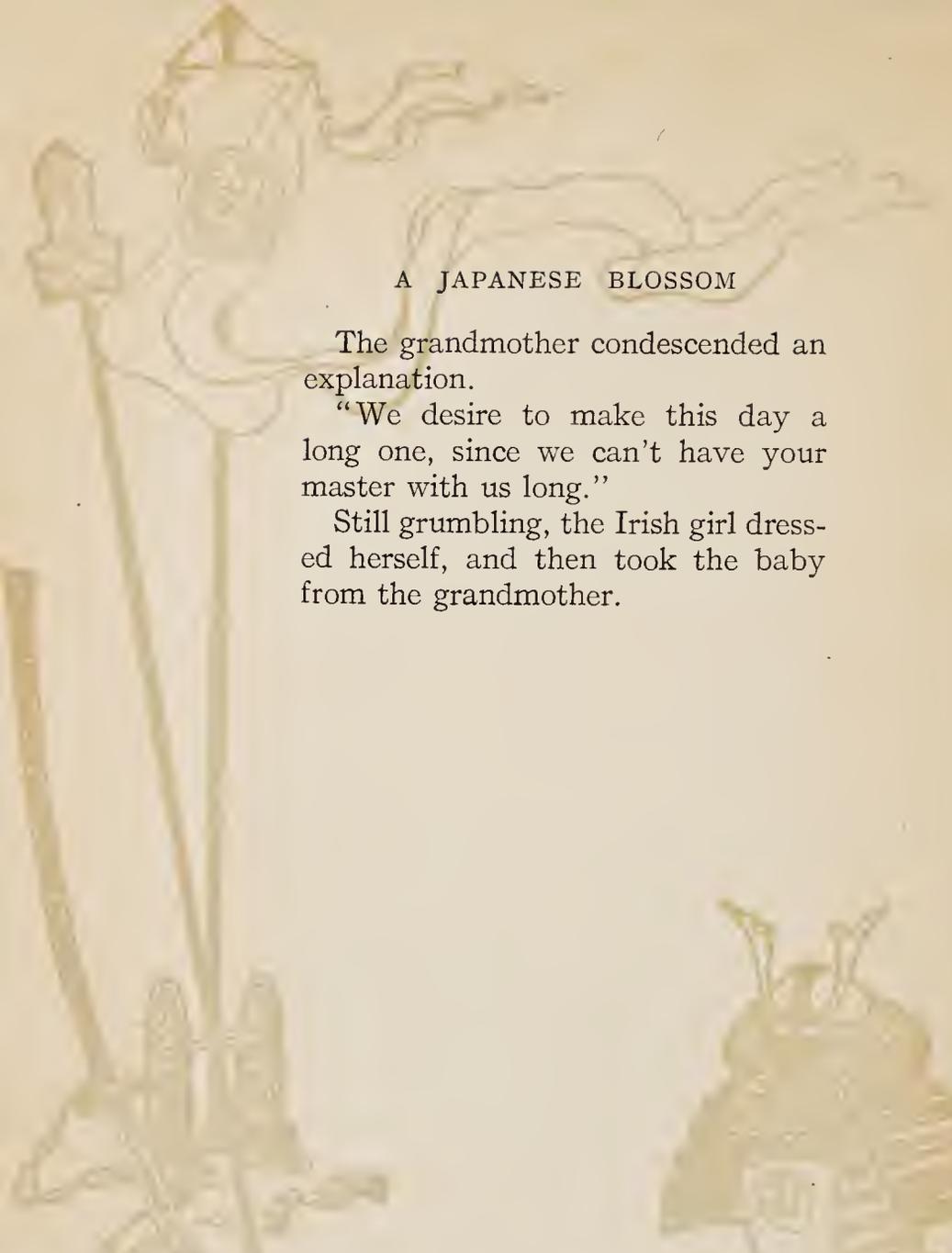
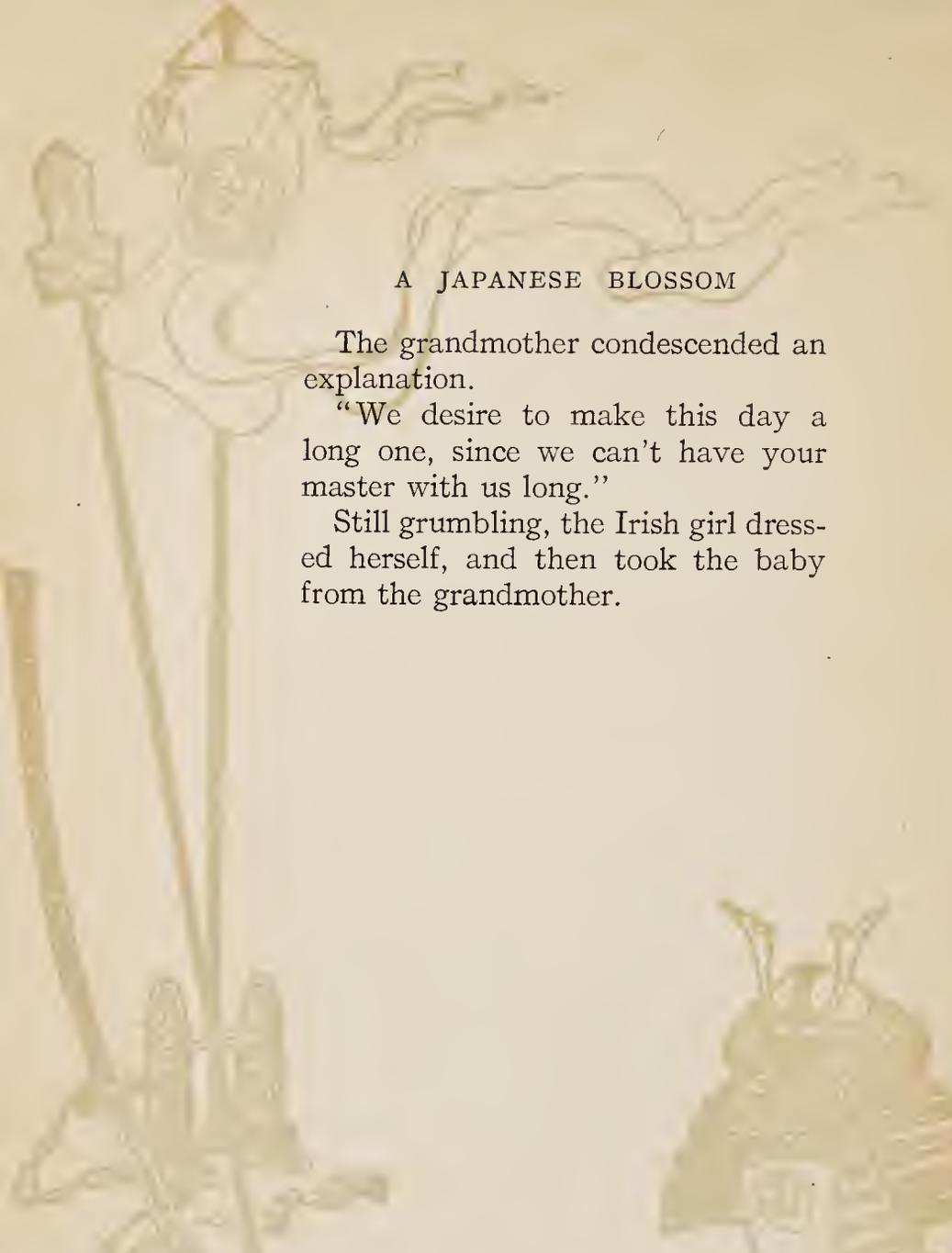
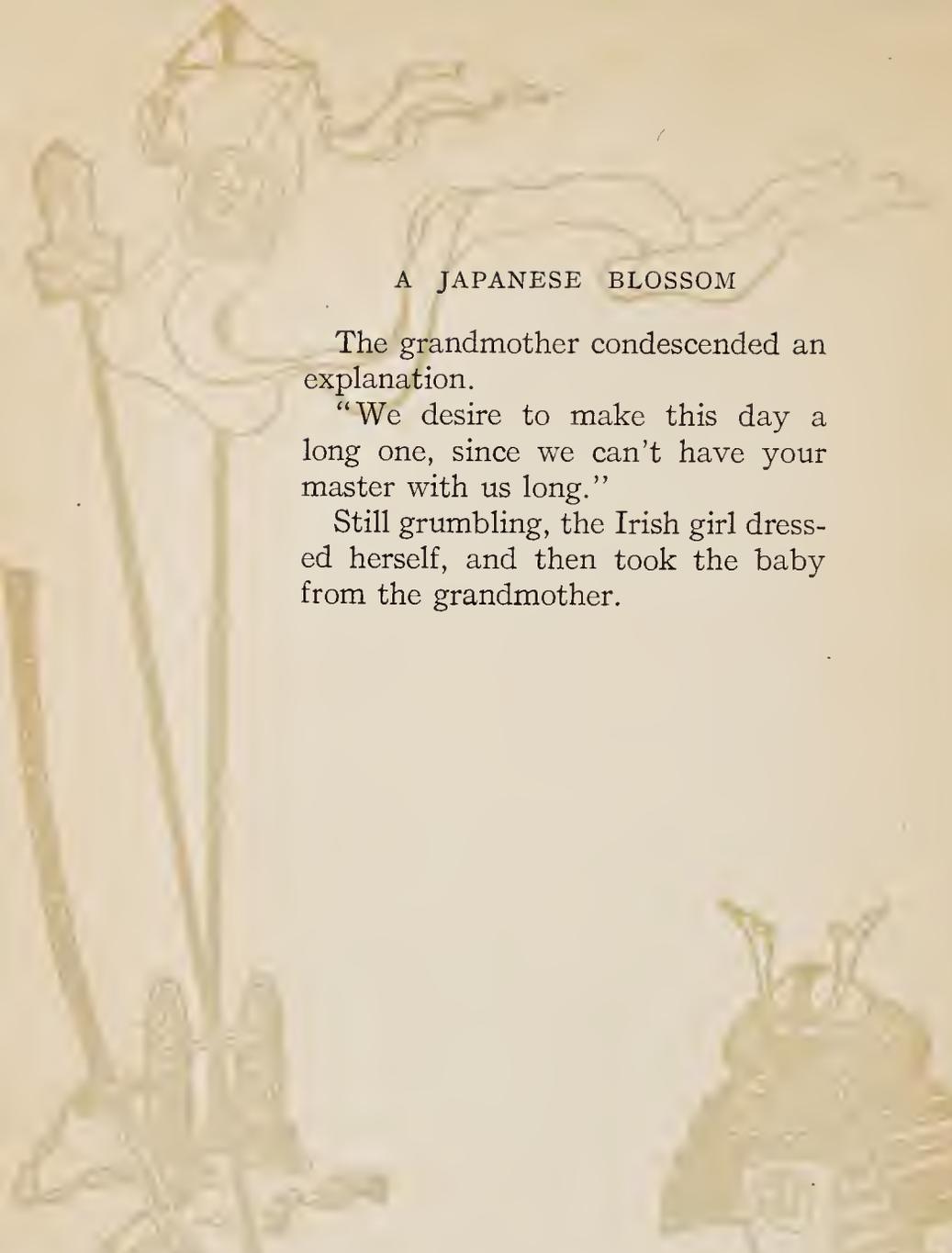
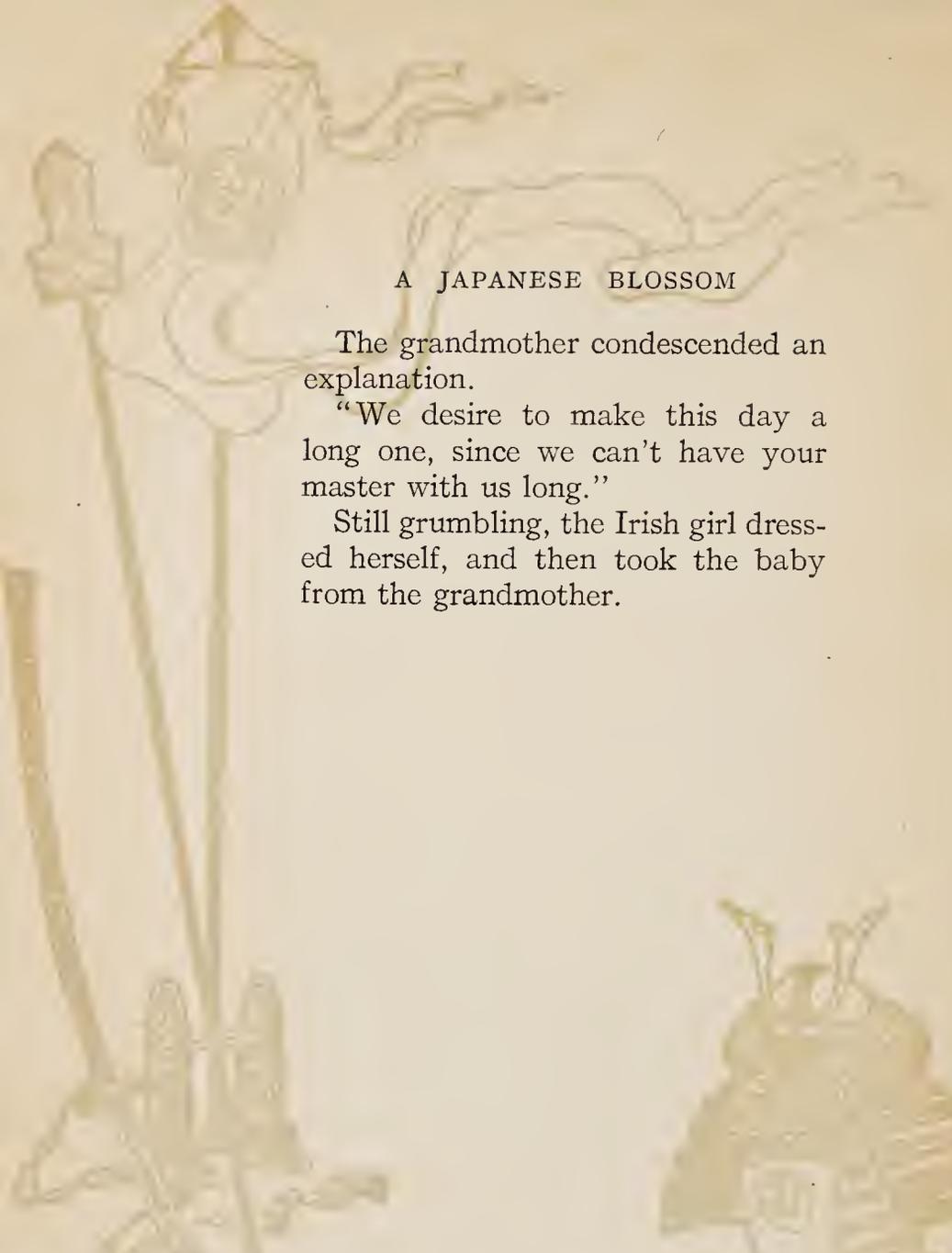
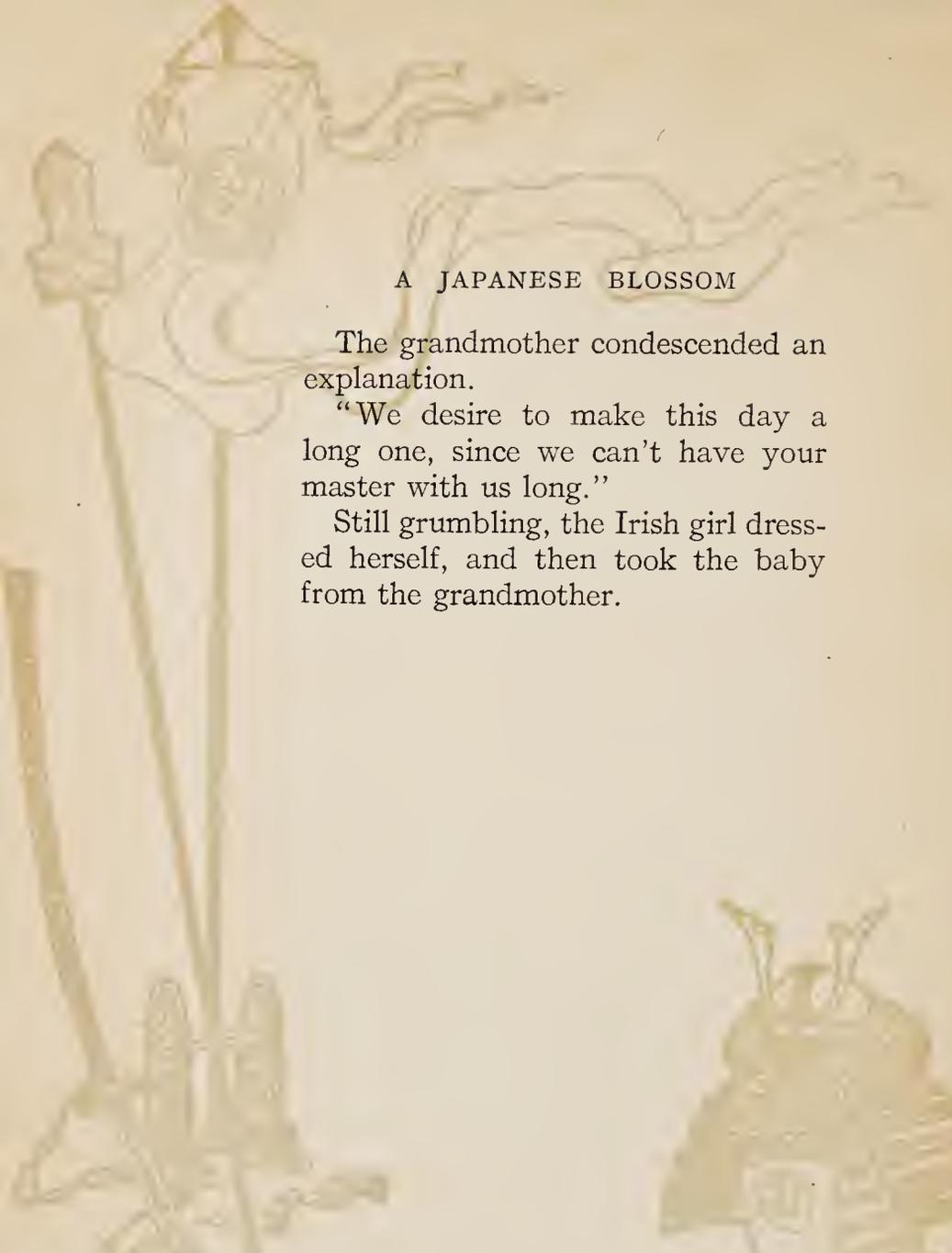
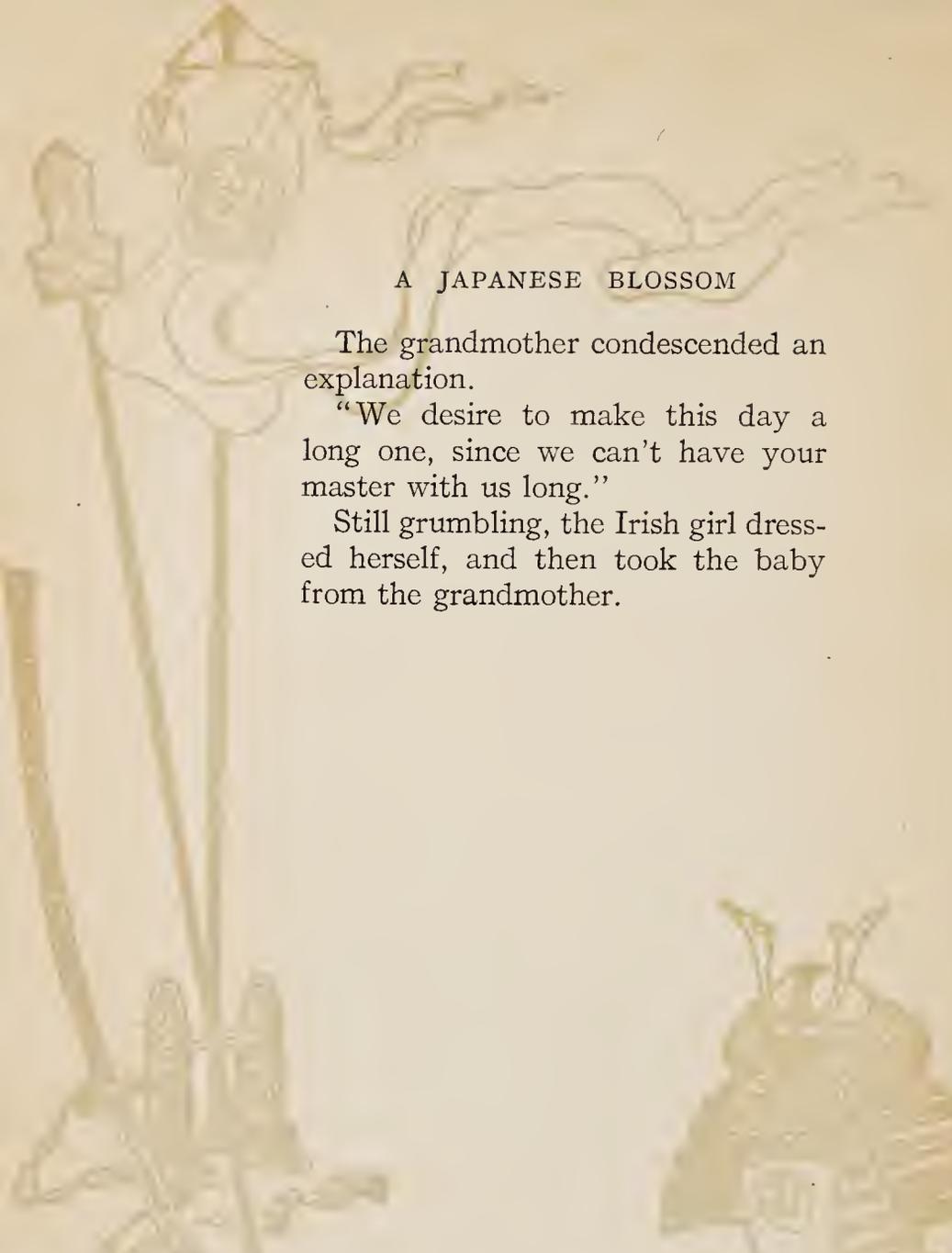
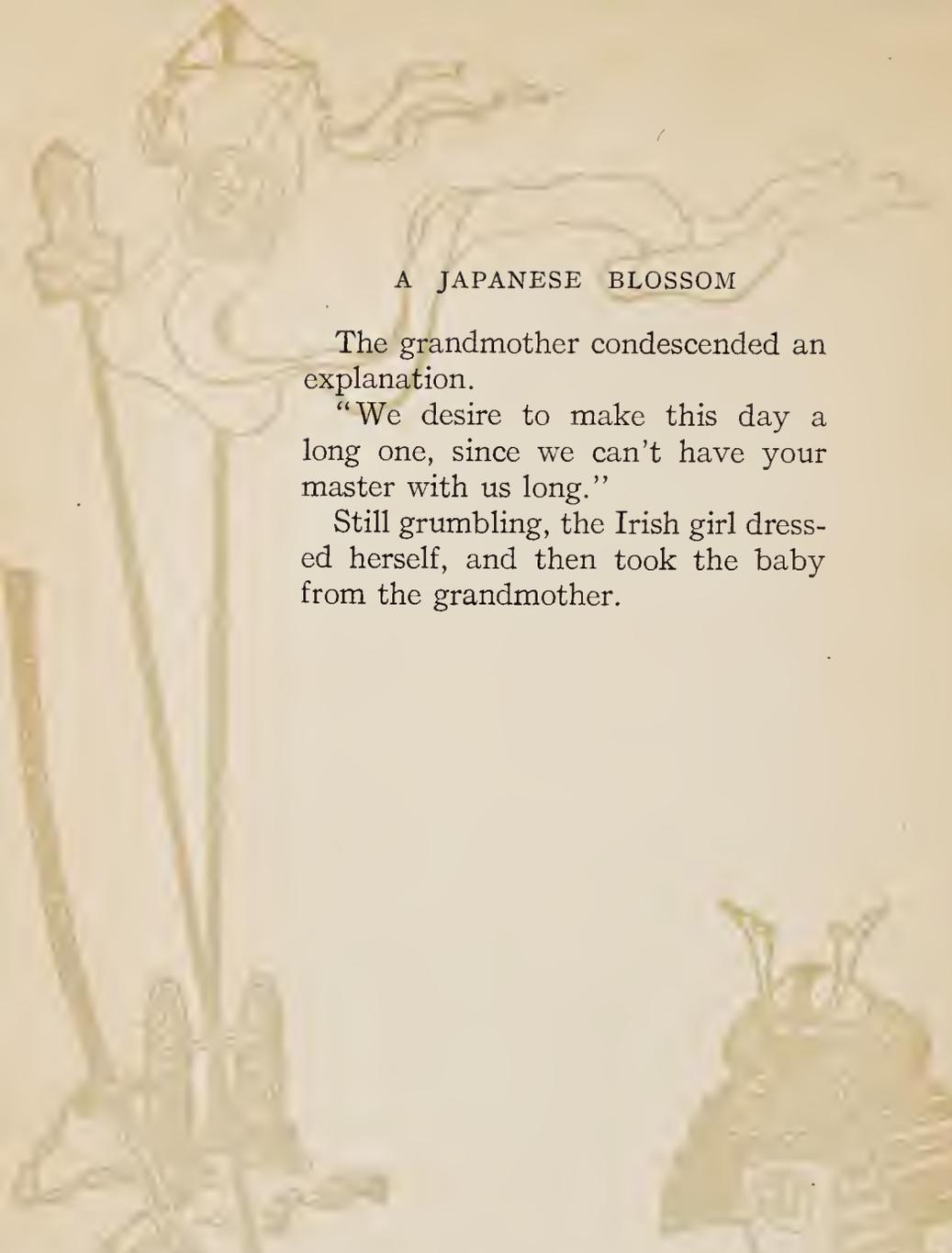
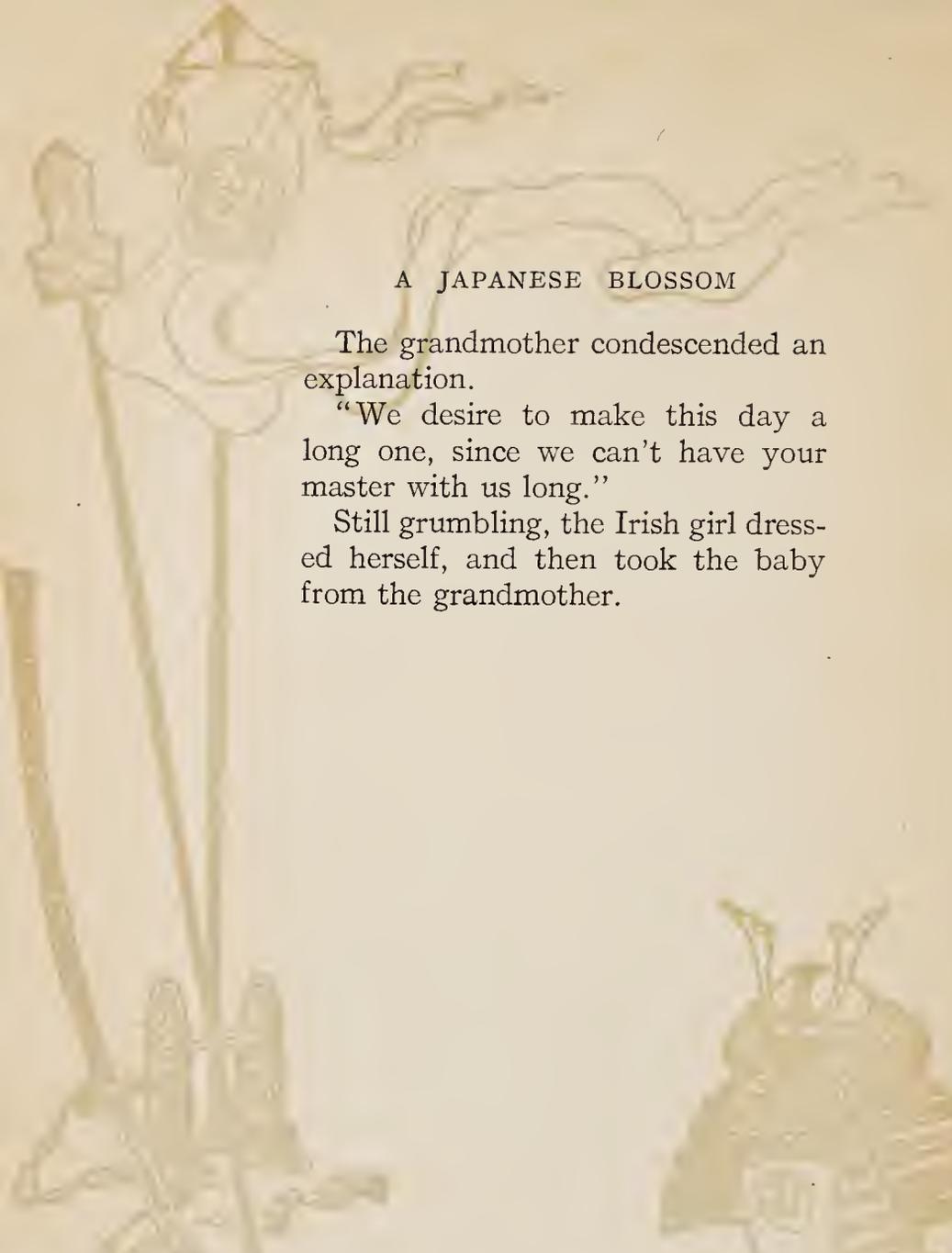
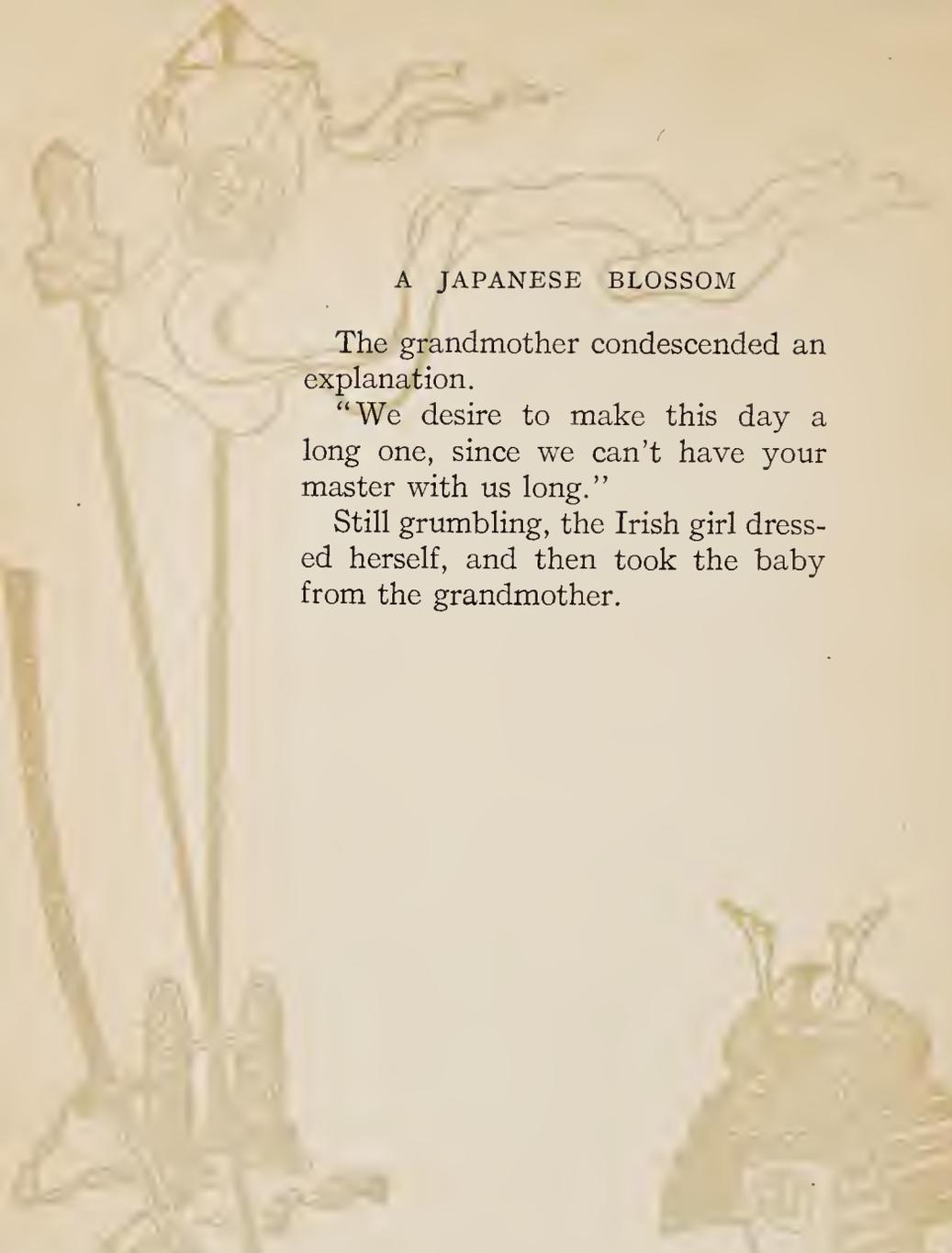


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The grandmother condescended an explanation.

"We desire to make this day a long one, since we can't have your master with us long."

Still grumbling, the Irish girl dressed herself, and then took the baby from the grandmother.



#### XIV

THE farewell breakfast was as merry a one as they could make it under the circumstances. To please the father, it was served in the ceremonious Japanese fashion peculiar to such a time. There were hot rice and freshly fried fish, fruit, persimmons and oranges, and clear, delicious tea. Everything, in fact, there was to tempt the appetite at this time, when the appetite might fail them. Even Mrs. Kurukawa, whose white face showed a night of wakefulness, ate some of the crisp, inviting fish, and drank the tea with grateful relish. Mr. Kurukawa ap-

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peared all cheerfulness. He made them gifts. Each of the family had an exchange gift for him. Smiling whimsically, he looked at the little pile.

"Do you suppose I can find room to take them to the front with me?" he asked his wife, jocularly.

"Oh yes, yes," she said, earnestly, "for I advised them all to get you something you could use there."

"Let me see." He began going over the heap of presents. There were needles and thread from Plum Blossom. Iris had bought a tiny pair of scissors. Taro's gift was a little drinking-cup which folded up, a foreign novelty. Billy gave a jack-knife, such a one as he had long saved to buy for himself. A little Bible was Marion's gift. The grandparents gave the most sensible gift—certain clothes he would appreciate, compactly rolled in a small bundle,

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and consisting of Japanese underwear and sandals. He would find them grateful after long use of the uniform. Juji had been permitted to choose his own gift.

"Buy something for father," said Plum Blossom in the store. Then Juji had pointed with a fat finger at something bright. It proved to be a silk handkerchief. Even Norah and the baby had gifts for him. A pin the Irish girl had prized much, since it had been given her by an old sweetheart, and which bore in twisted letters of silver the legend, "Remember me," was the nurse's tribute. The baby's gift Mrs. Kurukawa had chosen—a leather folder containing the photographs of the entire family. Her own gift she put upon his finger, a ring he had given her. "Bring it back to me," she said, and he promised that he would.



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The parting took place on the threshold. It was not similar to that of most Japanese farewells, for Mr. Kurukawa embraced his little girls and his wife, and they clung about his neck and kissed him, while Marion, because she could not keep back her tears, rushed into the house to hide them.

The boys, Billy, Taro, and Juji, were allowed to go with him to the train. As Gozo had done, Mr. Kurukawa carried Juji on his shoulder.

The little boys waved their flags as the train drew out, and shouted at the top of their voices.

“Banzai! Banzai! Banzai Dai Nippon!”

They were silent as they made their way homeward. Even Billy, the garrulous, found he could not speak with such a great lump chok-

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ing his throat. When they reached the house they found all the blinds drawn. Suspecting that the "females," as Taro called them, had retired to weep in their rooms, Taro drew Billy towards the pond.

"Let's play," said he.

Billy shook his head.

"Play fight," urged Taro. "*I* will be Admiral Togo—you be the Lussian admiral."

"*Me* a Russian!" cried Billy, fiercely.

"Yaes, because you loog jes' same."

At the insult Billy became purple. He shouted:

"I don't. Father says when I wear your old kimono I look Japanese. *I'll* be Togo. I'm the oldest."

Taro shook his head.

"I tell you what," said Billy. "Juji can be the Russian. See how

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sleepy and lazy he looks. Let's just duck him in the water and wake him up."

"He'll cry too much."

"Oh, the Russians all cry and pray and make a big noise, but they can't do anything after a Jap gets them. We won't really hurt Juji. He'll groan like a wounded Russian, and you can be a Red Cross Japanese doctor and make him better."

"All lide," said Taro.

So they began to play.

## XV

SUMMER, with its flowers, carnivals, moonlight fêtes and banquets, is a season of unalloyed bliss to Japanese children. It seemed as if all nature took a holiday, and bade the children and the grown folks, too, come forth from their houses and rejoice at her beauty and happiness.

Never before had the Japanese held so many celebrations. But this year their festivals were not in honor of the beauty of the flowers or the glory of the moon. They tossed their fans, their parasols, any article, above their heads. They marched

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the streets of the towns at night with swinging lanterns and torches in their hands, sometimes singing and always shouting, "Banzai! Banzai!" Impassive faces turned ruddy with excitement and pride. Even delicate-faced ladies leaned from their jinrikishas in the public streets and waved the sun flags in their hands. Never had a flower festival drawn forth such enthusiasm and excitement. On all sides people spoke the word, breathlessly, with smiling lips:

"Victory! Always victory for Dai Nippon."

The Kurukawa family caught the spirit of the country. There was not a member of the little flock that did not feel a personal pride in Japan's achievements. Even Mrs. Kurukawa, after the first shock of the actual sense of loss had passed, refused to be oppressed by her sorrow.

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By this time her husband's friends in the town were hers. She became a member of a society which had for its aim the succor of the town's poor families whose wage-earners had been given to the war. No Western women's club or society ever worked harder than did these little Japanese women when they took upon themselves the actual support of the poor of the town. Mrs. Kurukawa found a wonderful comfort in the work. All the little girls assisted. Immediately after the departure of her husband the grandmother had come to her with a suggestion that at first she could not understand.

"Now that the master has gone," had said the old woman, "shall we not dismiss all the servants?"

"But why?" she had inquired, astonished. "We can afford to keep them, can we not?"

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Madame Sano could not make her reasons understood. For a time she went about the house very gloomy and unhappy, shaking her old head as the servants waited upon their mistress and the children. She herself refused to be waited upon. Her own meals she cooked herself. It was shortly after she had become a member of the Aid Society that Mrs. Kurukawa learned from another member that most of the war families had dismissed their servants, or kept at most but one scullery maid. The little Japanese lady told her at the same time that none of them had bought new clothes since the beginning of the war, and that some of them had refused fire, food, and luxuries. The reason was this. Their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers were suffering hardship and peril. It would be unseemly for them to live

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in luxury. Since they could not share that hardship at the front with their men they would deny themselves at home.

“But what of the servants?” Mrs. Kurukawa had asked. “They would be without employment.”

The answer was prompt. “The men - servants belong to the war service. Some of the women receive reduced wages. The money saved is devoted to charity. The servants themselves understand that they, too, must make sacrifices. Some of them are sent by their mistresses to the homes of the poor and the sick, there to work.”

When she returned home Mrs. Kurukawa called the family together to tell them of her resolve. They would keep but one maid-servant and Norah, the nurse. The maid-servant would do the cooking and

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the scullery work. Marion, Plum Blossom, and Iris were to do all the chamber work and keep the second floor clean and sweet. Madame Sano would do the sewing. The boys must take care of the garden and draw the water. Mrs. Kurukawa would see to the rest of the house. As the average Japanese family of similar circumstances kept a great many servants — in fact, any number of “assistants,” cook’s assistant, scullery assistant, etc.—the Kurukawas had in all fourteen, including the men who worked in the garden and the rice-fields. Of these, one old man’s services were retained. The younger men were advised to enlist if they could. If not, they would receive reduced wages and be employed in caring for the poor. So the work previously done by the servants was now done cheerfully and happily

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

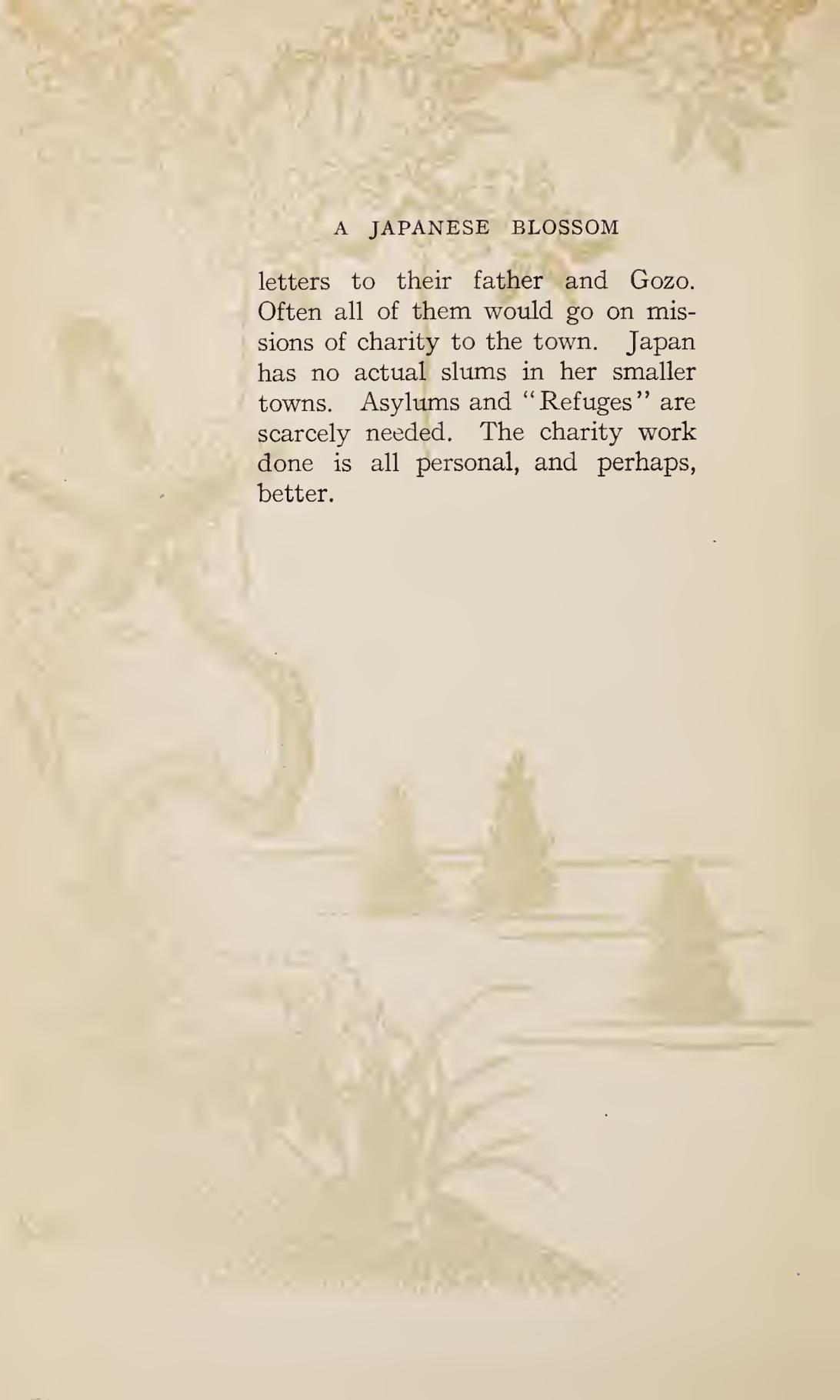
by the members of the Kurukawa family.

No chamber-maid ever cleaned a sleeping-chamber with more pleasure than did the little girls. Their hair wrapped about in white linen, their sleeves rolled up, they made the bamboo brooms fly across the floor.

"If one liddle bit of dust be in corner even," said Plum Blossom, "I shall die of shame."

That was the spirit of all.

They who had never known what it was to wash their own bright faces, now joyfully did all such services for themselves and for one another. They were always so busy that they found no time for sadness. They arose with the sun to busy themselves in the house throughout the mornings. The afternoon was given to more pleasurable work. They would sew and embroider in the garden, or write

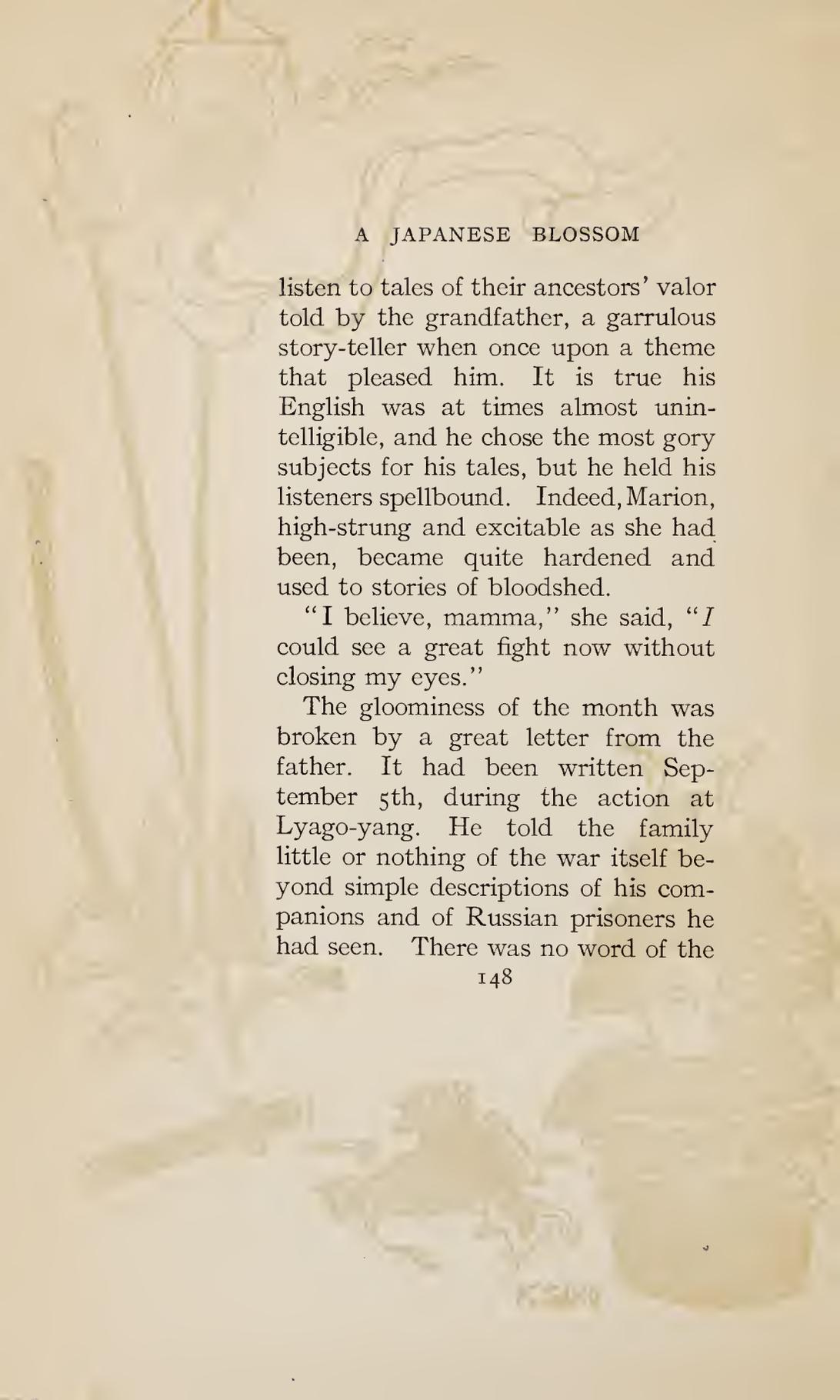


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letters to their father and Gozo. Often all of them would go on missions of charity to the town. Japan has no actual slums in her smaller towns. Asylums and "Refuges" are scarcely needed. The charity work done is all personal, and perhaps, better.

## XVI

OCTOBER forced the little family in-doors. It was a bleak month, cold and chilly this year. There is a general superstition in Japan that this desolate month, when the gods are all absent, will bring disaster to all who observe events connected with home joys. The Kurukawas were Christians, and had no faith in these childish superstitions; nevertheless, they instinctively felt the contagion of the general feeling of dreariness everywhere. Nearly every afternoon they were wont to gather together in the great ozashiki, and there they would talk of the war, or



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listen to tales of their ancestors' valor told by the grandfather, a garrulous story-teller when once upon a theme that pleased him. It is true his English was at times almost unintelligible, and he chose the most gory subjects for his tales, but he held his listeners spellbound. Indeed, Marion, high-strung and excitable as she had been, became quite hardened and used to stories of bloodshed.

"I believe, mamma," she said, "I could see a great fight now without closing my eyes."

The gloominess of the month was broken by a great letter from the father. It had been written September 5th, during the action at Lyago-yang. He told the family little or nothing of the war itself beyond simple descriptions of his companions and of Russian prisoners he had seen. There was no word of the

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hardships, no word of the battles fought, and he was now a veteran. He wrote that at night when he closed his eyes he could see them all so clearly, as they had looked in their cherry gowns on that day of the flower festival. It seemed now so far away that he sometimes wondered if he were the same man who, covered with cherry-blossom petals, told them the foolish story of "The Widow of Sanyo." There were messages for each child individually. Finally he wrote that he had not seen Gozo, but that he knew of his whereabouts. Soon he hoped to be with him.

The children rushed for their little writing-desks. Soon, heels doubled under, all of them were busily engaged in writing to father. Mrs. Kurukawa, too, writing at her desk, described the absorbed group about

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her. After a time the various epistles were read aloud by their authors. With her little lisp Plum Blossom read her letter:

“HONORABLE FADDER,—We got you proud ledder. Oh, how happy we feel! I kees this ledder ride this one place. Please kees me bag agin. I lig kees. I am now chamber-maid and Marion she also chamber-maid and Iris also. Housé nêver so clean before. We keep light all time burn for you and Gozo. Juji burn his liddle finger with match. When we hear of grade victory we blow plenty fire worg and Juji burn match. Thas something for him. I am now soon 13 years ole. Kees agin that spot as I do.

“Your most obedient and filialest

“daughter foraver,

“P. B.”

As soon as Plum Blossom ceased, Iris began reading. Her letter proved to be, however, an almost exact copy of her sister's, for, sitting

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close to Plum Blossom, she had simply copied her sister's letter bodily, thus saving herself the labor of composition. They all laughed when she re-read Plum Blossom's letter. Marion read hers shyly.

“DEAR FATHER,—Please come back soon. I pray for you every night. Have you got my Bible still? I hope you read it. Do you remember Miss Lamb in Chicago? She used to be my Sunday-school teacher, and when you became my papa she told me to be sure to urge you to read the Bible, for that was the way to convert the heathen, and I told her you were not a heathen, but my own dear father, and the best man in the world. But I don't know why I condescended to write about Miss Lamb at this time. It makes my letter so long.

Dear father, I do love you. Mamma cries for you at night.”

She was interrupted here by a protest from the family. Father ought

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not to be told of tears. So she scratched that sentence out laboriously, and then continued:

“I know she cries at night, because her eyes show it, and it’s because she loves you so. So please come back to her at once and—”

Billy interrupted this time. “How much longer is it?” he asked, gruffly. Marion continued, her face flushed:

“—and this is all, dear father, and I hope you will win the fight, only please, please don’t kill anybody or let any one kill you. Your own little ‘Yankee girl,’  
“MARION.”

“P. S.—Give my best love to Gozo, and tell him I pray for him, too, and, please, also, would you lend him the Bible I gave you sometimes?”

It was Taro’s turn. He began

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reading in Japanese, but was forced to translate:

“AUGUST FATHER,—I would like much to be with you and fight. I could kill ten Russians now for Samurai Komatzou has taught me some great tricks. Billy says I would make a giant Russian look like ‘30 cents.’ Billy also wants to be Japanese soldier. We hope war lasts till we grow up so your two dutiful sons may enlist. I sign myself now your unworthy son,

“TARO.”

Billy’s letter was characteristic.

“DEAR FATHER,—Are there any drummer-boys our age? Have *you* killed any Russians yourself? How did you do it? Did you shoot him or run your sword through his bowels like that ancestor you told us about did? Do you use my jack-knife any? I hope it’s useful. I wish I was grown-up. Say, would you ask Gozo, when you see him, to send me some Russian buttons. He sent one to Marion.

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It was all rusty, and she gave it to me, as Taro told there was blood on it. Taro and I worked very hard this summer in the garden, but it's great sport. We pretended we were digging trenches, and whenever we found stones we said they were bullets, and we piled them up together, and after a time had lots of ammunition. Say, there's a French boy living out here, and he told Taro that after a time there'd be no Japs left, because Japan was so small, and he said we'd all be killed off, and he said that the regiments would have to have boys in them soon, because his father said so. Is it true, and if so, can't Taro and I come at once? Taro licked the Frenchy till he squeaked for mercy, and his father came out and jabbered a lot of gibberish, and he got terribly excited and said, 'Insoolt to France!' and everybody laughed at him. Well, this is all. We want the French boy to play war with us, but he's like Rojestvensky, he bluffs—but we'll catch him yet. Say, father, write something about the fight and if you're wounded anywhere. Aff.,

"BILLY."

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“Talk about long letters,” said Marion.

“Oh, well,” said Billy, “*I* had something to say. Besides, if it’s true what the Frenchy says, Taro and I will be soldiers soon, too, and father ought to know.”

## XVII

THERE was a long silence from the soldier in Manchuria. The Kurukawas, like many other families in Japan, watched for the mail each day with greedy feverishness. But the autumn passed away and there was no further word from Kurukawa. He had told his wife she must expect these long silences. There were reasons that she must understand for such interludes. A soldier's letter cannot be had every day. And so she waited with the patience worthy of a brave woman. But when December was ushered in with a little drift of snow, and she

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knew that winter was coming, her thoughts wandered unceasingly to that one out there in the frozen Manchuria, and, brooding over it, her strength gave way. Nights passed; alone with a terrified imagination further exhausted her. Suddenly she decided that she must go at once to Tokio and make inquiry of the Minister of War of the fate of her husband. Leaving Juji and the baby at home, she took the three little girls and two older boys with her. She told the children nothing of her fears. They believed the trip to Tokio was made for the purpose of making purchases for the Christmas and New-Year's season.

"When you come back," had said the smiling old grandmother, "the honorable house will be quite new and fresh for New-Year's."

The children were excited by the

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prospect of a visit to Tokio. The Japanese children had never been in the large town. Thus it actually fell to Billy and Marion to describe Tokio to them, for they had passed two days in the city.

The little party arrived at the Shinbasi Station, where they took jinrikishas and rode through the bewildering streets to the Imperial Hotel. As it was past six o'clock, the children after dinner went straight to bed, thoroughly tired out. But Mrs. Kurukawa sought to see some one who could allay her anxiety. There were only two clerks left in the War Office at this hour. They were excessively polite and even sympathetic, going over all the lists of the dead and wounded they possessed. There were two Kurukawas among the wounded, but neither was her husband. She felt that a great load

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had been lifted from her, and with a happier heart she drove back to the hotel. For the first time in many days she slept in peace.

Early in the morning she was awakened by the children. They were crowded at the windows, looking out upon the streets and chattering.

"I'm going to buy all my gifts today," announced Marion, "because if we don't buy early all the best things will be snapped up," she added, wisely.

Taro said, reflectively: "I'm going to wait till second January."

"Second January!" cried Billy. "Why, that's after Christmas!"

Taro nodded.

"I nod give Christmas presents. I give only New-Year's gift."

"Oh, Taro!" cried Marion. "Why, we're going to have a Christmas-tree!"

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Who wants to wait till January second?"

"But thad is day the otakara (treasure - ships) are on streets," explained Plum Blossom.

"Yes," said Iris, "and in Tokio he has beau-tee-ful presents."

"Mother says we'll be home for Christmas. So how can you wait till January second?"

The little Japanese children's faces fell.

"Tha's true," admitted Iris, dejectedly.

"Oh, well," said Plum Blossom, consolingly, "the toshironschi is open in December, and I wan' take home wiz me plenty mochitsuki" (nice pastry).

"Are you dressed, children?" asked Mrs. Kurukawa, coming into the room.

They were in their quaint blue

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linen Japanese night-dresses, a queer little group, all barefooted.

They dressed quickly, busily talking and planning as they did so. The day was to be spent in the stores of Tokio. Never were there more enticing stores to shop in, the children thought. They got out their little savings, rolled up in paper handkerchiefs in their sleeves, and counted them over and over.

Billy had the most money, nearly twenty dollars in all. He had not saved a penny, but becoming desperate as the Christmas season advanced, he had sold nearly all his American clothes to various susceptible Japanese youth of the town. One paid him two dollars for a sailor hat. A young man of eighteen years now wore the twelve-year-old Billy's short trousers under a kimono. Three of his shirts had been pur-

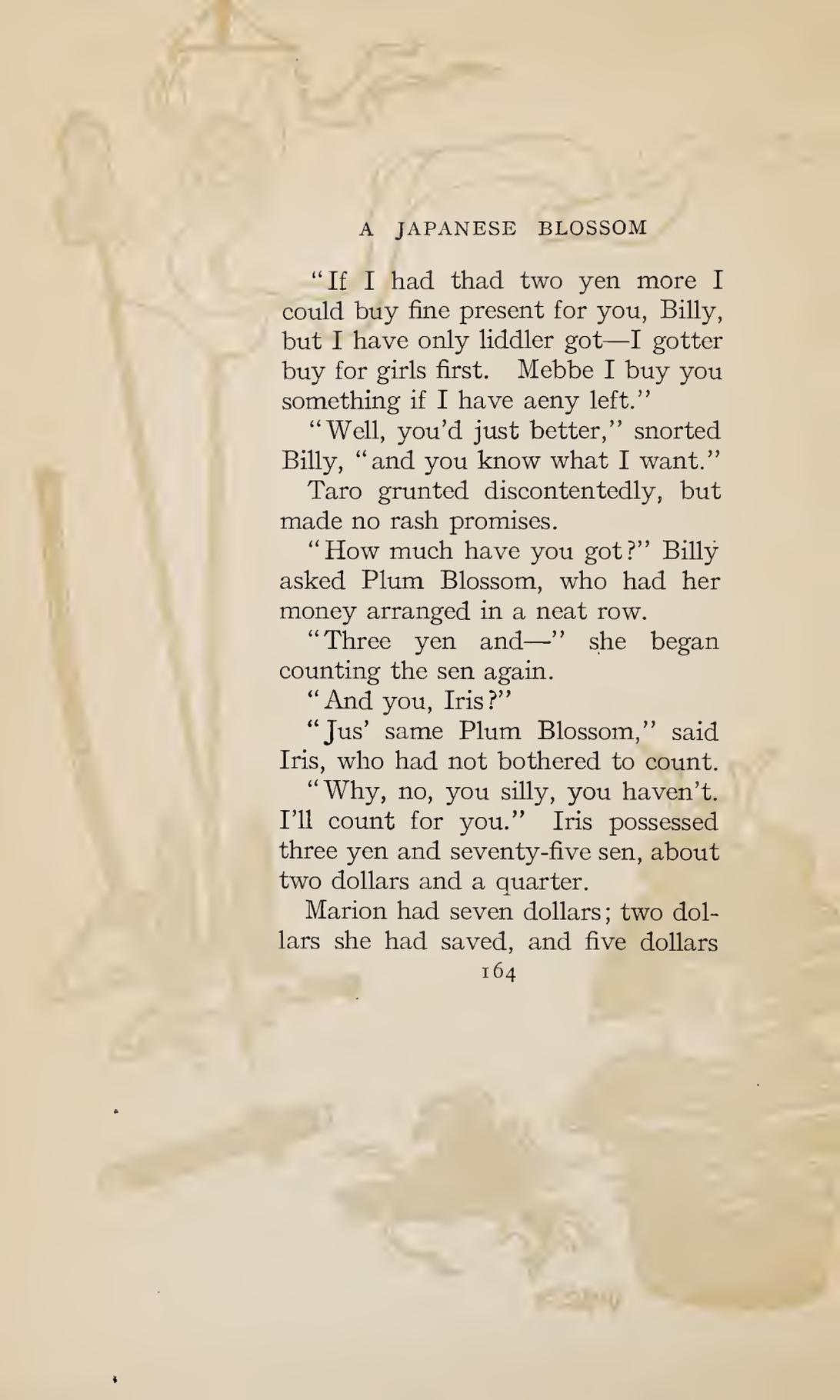
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chased by Miss Summer, which she proudly wore on festival occasions. Even his suspenders had proved marketable, and also his heavy shoes and rubbers. When he had asked his mother's permission to "give" his clothes away she had laughed and told him that by the time he ceased to wear kimonos again he would be too large for the American clothes he now possessed, and so had lightly given her consent. But she was quite distressed when she learned he had sold them. Billy, however, was equal to the occasion, and soon persuaded her that he had done right. "It would have been wrong to make the proud Japanese accept second-hand American clothes as charity." So Billy was now rich, and accordingly avaricious. He wished he had a hundred dollars instead of twenty dollars; then he could buy cameras

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and guns and such things which cost plenty of money, but since there was such a large family, and since the Japanese had to have presents at New-Year's as well, he couldn't afford costly ones. In any event he wanted them all to know that he was not going to spend more than half his money, as he was saving the other half for something for himself—he wouldn't tell what.

Ten dollars was Taro's total, but he had in addition an unopened bank half full of sen (pennies). He had been saving all summer, and would have had a larger sum, but he had generously contributed two yen to the support of an old coolie whose sons were at the war and whom his mother was befriending. Billy, too, had made a like contribution, though he said nothing about it now. Taro, however, could not forget that two yen.



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"If I had thad two yen more I could buy fine present for you, Billy, but I have only liddler got—I gotter buy for girls first. Mebbe I buy you something if I have aeny left."

"Well, you'd just better," snorted Billy, "and you know what I want."

Taro grunted discontentedly, but made no rash promises.

"How much have you got?" Billy asked Plum Blossom, who had her money arranged in a neat row.

"Three yen and—" she began counting the sen again.

"And you, Iris?"

"Jus' same Plum Blossom," said Iris, who had not bothered to count.

"Why, no, you silly, you haven't. I'll count for you." Iris possessed three yen and seventy-five sen, about two dollars and a quarter.

Marion had seven dollars; two dollars she had saved, and five dollars

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an aunt had sent her "to buy a pretty kimono with."

"But I have lots of kimonos," said Marion, "so I'll buy Christmas presents instead, as it's more blessed to give than to receive," she added, piously.

"All right," grinned Billy. "You must not expect to *receive* much, sis."

## XVIII

WHEN the little Kurukawa family started for the shopping district the streets were bathed in the beautiful early winter sun. In a city where the distances are very great, where large parks and actual stretches of bare country exist in seemingly the centre of the town and where the streets zigzag in every direction, it is a matter often of hours to reach certain points. But the children enjoyed the long ride. They would have laughed aloud at the average foreigner's complaint against the "jerkings jinrikisha." What child does not prefer a vehicle that bumps

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up and down a bit to one that runs inanely and smoothly?

Taro and Billy occupied one jinrikisha, Marion and Plum Blossom another, while Iris rode with her mother. They called across merrily to each other. When one runner, swifter-footed for the moment than his fellows, sped on ahead, the pair in advance would cheer in delight.

The speed with which the jinriki-men ran, Billy thought wonderful.

"They would beat anybody at our Sunday-school picnic races," he told Taro.

It would be great fun, suggested Taro, if some time they could come to Tokio alone and apprentice themselves to jinriki-men. Then they *would* learn to run! The suggestion thrilled Billy. He saw in it glowing possibilities of easily earned

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money; the opportunity to own a jinrikisha and learn to run like the wind. But, then, how would they be soldiers? Certainly their military ambitions came first.

At the end of two hours' running they drew up before a tea-house which stood within a little park of its own. Smiling and bowing the jinriki-men suggested that their patrons must be thirsty, as they, the runners, were. Would they not condescend to refresh themselves with tea and sweetmeats? The suggestion went to the hearts of the children. They had no idea how hungry they were, and so "mother" smilingly nodded to the little, begging faces. In a few moments they were within the tea-house. At that season of the year the tea-house is not well patronized, but as it was close to the noon hour, a number of Japanese business-men

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sat at the various tables eating their luncheon.

A maiden with roguish black eyes came running over to the Kurukawas to help the children into their seats. Her rosy mouth slipped open as she saw that her visitors, despite their dress, were not all Japanese. For a moment she stood perfectly still staring at Marion, but when Mrs. Kurukawa addressed her she slipped to her knees, bowed very deeply, and inquired what they might command her to bring.

All of them wanted tea and sweetmeats except Billy, who insisted upon having a piece of rare steak with fried onions. When Taro translated this astonishing order the little maid shook her head and laughingly declared that they were too poor a house to serve such extraordinary luxuries.

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"Well," said Billy, crossly, "I'm tired of rice-cakes and sweet things. I want something else. Do you keep chop-suey?" It was a dish he liked very much, having become acquainted with it through a Chinese cook lately employed. The little maid thought she might bring something resembling chop-suey. So she sped away to fill the orders. Soon she was back, followed by another maid carrying the luncheon on black lacquer trays. The omelets ordered by Mrs. Kurukawa were served in the most attractive shapes. Each omelet was formed in a different pattern, as a chrysanthemum, a twig of pine-tree, a plum blossom.

"They're too pretty to eat," said Marion, looking with delight at the flower form before her.

Billy's chop-suey was a chicken-stew, to which had been added



“THE LITTLE WAITRESS BROUGHT HER SAMISEN AND . . . . BEGAN TO PLAY AND SING”



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mushrooms. As they ate the meal the little waitress brought her samisen, and, running her fingers lightly across it, she began to first play and then to sing:

“Oh, the soldiers march away:  
See them march away.  
The maids at home must stay,  
Hush! do not weep, but pray,  
Oh, the soldiers march away!

“Oh, how long now will they stay?  
No one truth can say.  
When soldiers march away,  
List! often 'tis for aye,  
Oh, the soldiers march away!”

Her queer little staccato voice fell mournfully at the end, and the samisen concluded her song in its lower keys.

Plum Blossom tried to explain to them what it was she sang, though both Billy and Marion now partially understood the language.

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"The soldiers marching way, nae-  
ver, nae-  
ver come bag. All maidens  
must not cry, bud pray for them."

She threw a reproachful look at  
Marion, who had wept so often.

"Tell her to sing something hap-  
py," said Billy.

Mrs. Kurukawa addressed the girl,  
as she spoke Japanese with more  
than usual fluency.

"Whose songs do you sing?"

"My own, honored one."

"You make up your own songs?"

"Yes, gracious lady."

"The music, too?"

"Yes, augustness. By profession  
I am a geisha, but since the war our  
business is so poor we are obliged to  
become tea-waitresses also."

"And are geishas also poetesses  
and musicians?"

"Yes, gracious one. Shall I write  
my honorably foolish poetry for you,

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and will you condescend to accept it?"

"I should be delighted. I should keep it always. But sing to us again."

She sang shrilly, to the high notes of her samisen:

"Look! the moon is peeping,  
Little maid, take care!  
Lovers trysts are keeping,  
Little maid, take care!

"Lovers oft are weeping,  
Little maid, take care!  
When the moon is peeping,  
Little maid, take care!

"Who is this comes creeping?  
Little maid, take care!  
Hah! the moon still peeping,  
Little maid, take care!

"Oh, the heart upleaping!  
Little maid, take care!  
Lovers?—moon a-peeping!  
No! It's brother there!  
Little maid, take care!"

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Still squatting on her heels, the little geisha-girl wrote her poems in Japanese characters for the American woman. Then bowing very deeply she presented them to her, saying sweetly:

“Two sen, highness, one sen for each poem.”

Mrs. Kurukawa paid the price, and laughed as she did so.

## XIX

THE tea-house was only a short distance from the shops, and the runners, rested and refreshed by sake, drew them swiftly into the heart of the town. Soon they were in a shop kept by a tiny Japanese, very old and very wrinkled, who begged, as he bowed deeply, that they would help themselves to all they saw in his most insignificant shop. The magnificence of this offer, made in intelligible English, quite delighted Billy. He began to have visions of what he would do with his twenty dollars since this Japanese was so polite that he was actually

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

offering to *give* them the articles. Soon he was undeceived. In a short time the unwary children were enmeshed in the wily bargaining web of the shrewd small merchant of Tokio.

Billy saw a flag which warmed his heart. It was a large Japanese flag, with the sun solidly embroidered in its centre. What a gift to send to his father! In imagination he saw the flag torn and cut by bullets. He priced it. It was ten dollars. The old man insinuated that he might take eight dollars for it. Billy shook his head, swallowing deep disappointment. The old man would let it go for five dollars. No? Possibly the young augustness was poor? Billy flushed proudly and dipped into his sleeve for his money. Then he said, sturdily: "I'll give you a dollar for it."

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

The old man shrugged, protested, but finally rolled up the flag tenderly and gratefully took the dollar in exchange.

"My goodness!" said Billy, "are there Jews in Japan?"

"Be careful, Billy," his mother warned.

She herself, however, was feeling strangely drawn towards a certain padded silk dressing sack, heavily embroidered with chrysanthemums of the color most admired by her husband. Unlike Billy, she did not pause to bargain. Her husband had warned her: "The Japanese shopkeeper will take what he can get. Set your price and give no more."

"I'll give you five dollars for that," said she. Then she felt ashamed of herself when he, with a sad shake of his head, began wrapping it up for her.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

The little girls' purchases were trifling but pretty. Their sleeves, being full of parcels, hung down on either side like heavy bags. Billy's and Taro's purchases, however, were so large that there was some question how they were to be carried.

Three swords, an old American rifle, and a water-pistol were among Taro's acquisitions. Billy had his large flag, a soldier's uniform, a miniature cannon, and a folio of bright pictures describing war. At the last moment his conscience smote him. Neither he nor Taro had bought presents for the girls. Both had been too absorbed in buying things for boys. They put their heads together and whispered now. Ten cents remained to each. Taro bought toothpicks, cheapest face-powder, nail-polish and a back-scratcher, each article costing three

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cents. He grudgingly gave up one of the articles he had already, and instead purchased for the mother a pot of the rosiest paint.

Billy, too, begrudged the money necessary to spend on the girls, so he was determined not to part with any of his own things. His gifts cost in the neighborhood of a cent or two cents each. For Marion he bought one paper handkerchief, for Plum Blossom a brass ring, for Iris a hat-pin, for Juji a bit of candy, and for Norah tooth-blackening. This, he thought, she could utilize for her shoes. As the presents looked very bright and gaudy, Billy and Taro felt that they had done their duty, and that the girls ought to be duly grateful.

On the way home a shrill voice shouting in the street was recognized by the sharp-eared Taro.

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"The treasure-ship!" he cried, excitedly.

Around the corner came a most wonderful cart piled high with brightly colored toys and things dear to the heart of a child. Following the cart was a veritable procession of little children. Loudly the vendor shouted:

"Otakara! Otakara!"

Ambitious to imitate the commercial foreigner, the treasure-vendor had decided to play this little trick on his fellows. He would not wait till January 2d, but would appear on the street with his treasure cart thus early in the season when people had not yet spent all their money.

The entreaty in the faces of the children Mrs. Kurukawa could not resist. Soon some of the bright things of the treasure-cart were transferred to the jinrikishas.

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

“But, mind you, children,” she said, as they turned gleefully homeward, “I’m going to put everything away until Christmas.”

XX

THE following day Mrs. Kurukawa yielded to the coaxing of the children and took them to hear one of the famous story-tellers of Tokio. There is not a child, I believe, of any nationality, who does not love a "story." In Japan story-telling is an actual profession, possessing its own halls and houses of entertainment. But the audience is not made up of children. People of all ages attend, though the story-teller is not as popular to-day as he once was. With eagerness, then, the little Kurukawa children, after hanging their clogs among others, entered the hall.

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They were led into a square little booth or box. In a few minutes a waitress from an adjoining tea-house sold them refreshments.

The hall was dimly lighted by candles. As black cloths were draped about the stage the place had a gloomy appearance. Presently the story-teller entered and seated himself on the raised dais. So horrible and weird was his aspect that the little girls involuntarily clung to one another's hands and looked at their mother apprehensively. His face and bald head were chalky white. Seen from the distance of their box his eyes were black chasms set into his white face. He appeared to have enormous teeth which protruded as long fangs beyond his lips. As he seated himself on the dais all the candles in the hall went out, seemingly of their own accord. Only

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those upon the stage remained burning.

"Oh," said Marion, grasping Taro's hand in the darkness, "he looks like some horrible ghost!"

"Sh!" whispered the little Japanese boy. "He's going to tell a ghost-story."

"I thought," broke in Billy, "they told war-stories."

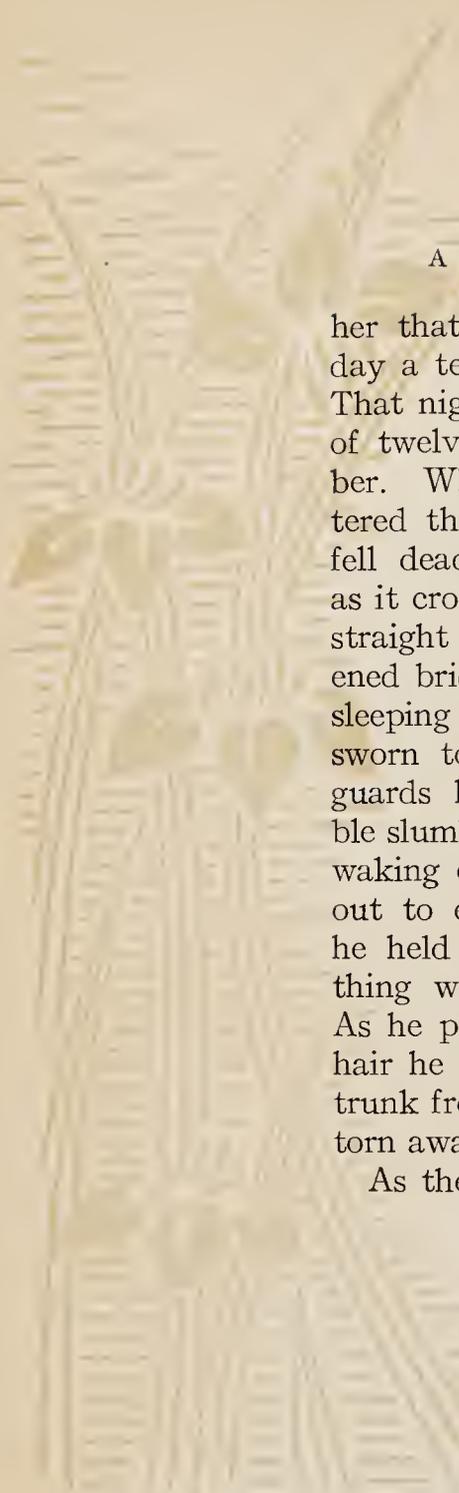
"Sh! I'll tell you what he says, if you be quiet."

"I don't want to hear," said Marion, covering her ears with her hands, for at that moment the deep and hollow voice of the story-teller fell upon the hushed audience. He was a pantomimist as well as a story-teller. As both Billy and Marion understood some Japanese he made his story clear even to them. As he proceeded with his tale the candles on the stage gradually flickered out,

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until he was in darkness, save for a weird yellow glow surrounding him. Then it was that the thrilled audience thought they saw strange white shapes fluttering about him, first hovering over and covering the speaker, then wandering about the stage.

The tale he told was an old one known to all Japanese. It was the story of the faithless husband who swore to his young and dying wife that he would never marry again. Scarcely, however, had she been cold in her grave before he married a young and beautiful girl. For many nights the bride was visited by a wraith with warning to leave her husband. She would wake screaming with fright, but always her husband, lying there beside her, would reassure her. Finally the ghost set a day for the bride's departure, telling



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her that if she did not go on that day a terrible fate would befall her. That night the husband set a guard of twelve watchmen in their chamber. When the ghostly visitor entered the room of armed men they fell dead at the feet of the spirit as it crossed the threshold and went straight to the bed where the frightened bride covered close against her sleeping lord, for although he had sworn to keep the watch with the guards he had yielded to irresistible slumber. The following morning, waking early, he stretched his arms out to enfold his bride. The form he held was stiff and cold. Something wet and slimy touched him. As he put out a hand to caress her hair he saw the thing beside him, a trunk from which the head had been torn away.

As the story-teller finished the re-

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cial there was a long interval of absolute silence in the hall. Then out of the darkness of the stage a white figure bore upon the vision. In the weird light that suddenly enwrapped the spectre the audience saw that it held aloft the head of a woman, the long, black hair floating away from the deathly face as though a wind were blowing through the hall.

A stir, a shiver seemed to pass at once over the whole audience. Then—almost an unknown thing in Japan—a child's shrill voice startled the silence. Mrs. Kurukawa reached out to catch Marion in her arms; the little girl had become almost paralyzed with fear. A moment later the candles were lighted. People looked at one another in the new light—everywhere faces were pale and lined with fear.

"Oh, let's go home," pleaded Marion, at which the mother arose.

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"No, no!" protested Taro. "He'll tell war-tales now. *We* want to stay."

"Of course we do," cried Billy. "That old cry-baby always spoils our fun."

A smiling waitress with candy beans assured them that the lights would not be turned out again, and so Marion leaned against her mother resignedly.

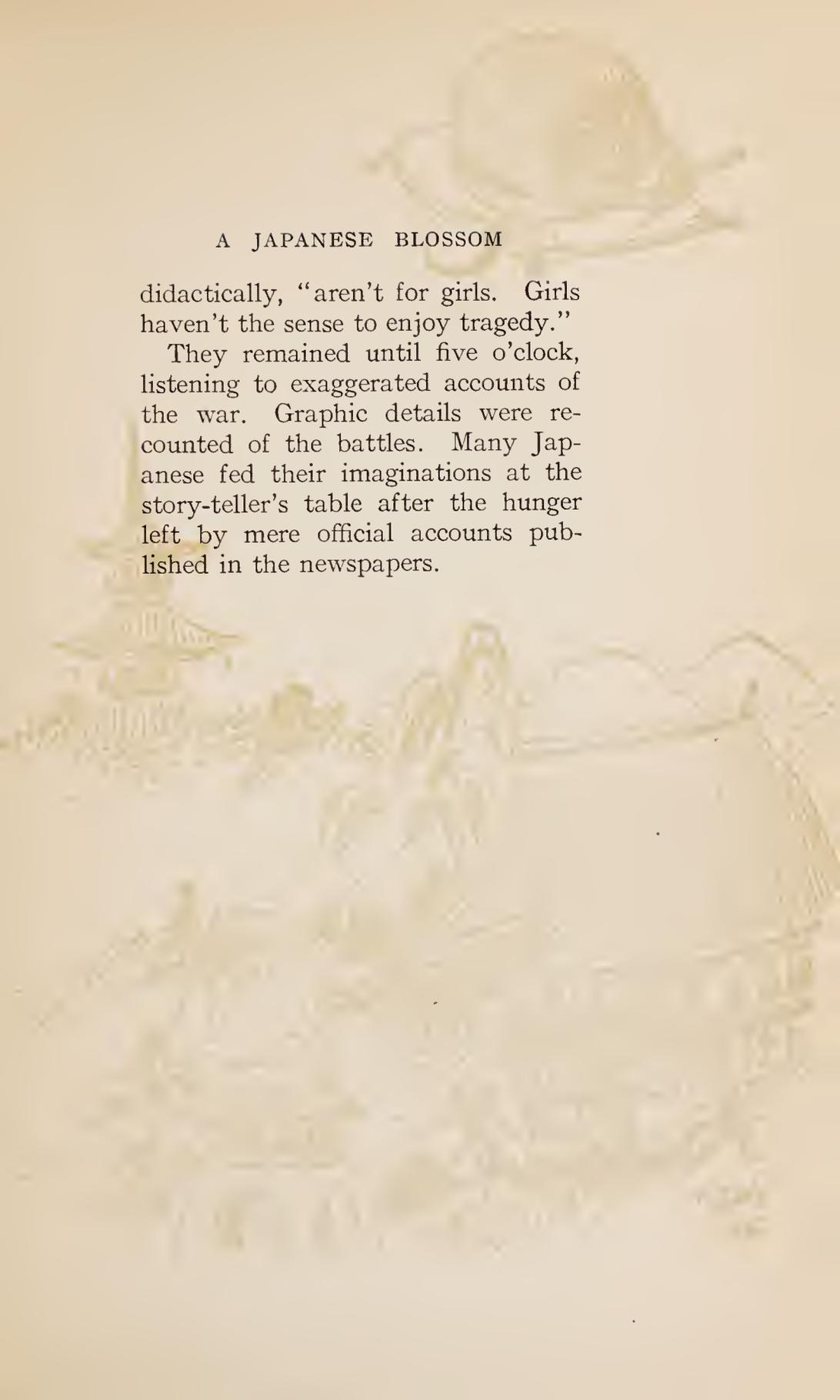
"*I* wasn't the only one afraid," she said, plaintively. "All of you were, even mother, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was," she answered, truthfully. "I didn't know I could feel quite so shivery over a mere ghost-story."

"Don't they ever tell pretty fairy-stories?" asked Marion.

"No," said Taro, disgustedly. "They would have no business then."

"Story-tellers' halls," said Billy,



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didactically, "aren't for girls. Girls haven't the sense to enjoy tragedy."

They remained until five o'clock, listening to exaggerated accounts of the war. Graphic details were recounted of the battles. Many Japanese fed their imaginations at the story-teller's table after the hunger left by mere official accounts published in the newspapers.

## XXI

THREE more days the little party remained in Tokio. Then, tired out, happy, and loaded down with purchases, they returned to their home. There they found the long-looked-for letter from the soldier. It had come during their absence.

He had not written sooner because the soldiers had been forbidden to write to their families during a certain period of operations. He hoped that his letter would reach them in time to make their Christmas and New Year season happy. His letter ran:

“As I write, I am a happy man, despite the many things of which I am deprived.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

First, I am a servant in a glorious cause. Who could choose a nobler way to die? It is with cheerfulness that we soldiers bear the enforced hardships. Indeed, we scarcely feel them, so buoyed up are we by our cause. But I have still another reason for happiness at this time. I am with my boy Gozo at last, and if the fates but permit, we shall never separate again. I have told him about you all, and his letter to you will reach you with my own. The experiences he has been through since leaving his father's home have made a man of him. And it is with a man's deep understanding that he asks your pardon. But he speaks for himself.

"I cannot send you gifts this year, my children and my wife, but my prayers and blessings are for you always. Tell Billy I cannot send him the Russian buttons for which he asks. I think he would understand if he were here. Let him imagine the kind of man who would cut away a trifling souvenir from the body of a dead enemy. Tell the boys also that I do not doubt their zeal to serve Japan, but that it is not likely we shall need

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their services. Their French friend had better revise his thoughts.

"I read many times the letters from my little girls. Tell Plum Blossom so well have I kissed the spot she indicated in her letter that there is a little hole there now. Tell my little Yankee girl, too, that not only have I lent her Bible to Gozo, but it is the common property of the little band of Christians in our regiment. There are fifteen of us in all. It will give Marion pleasure to know that her gift to me passes from hand to hand, and fifteen loyal soldiers of Ten-shi-sama unconsciously bless her each day they read.

"Take care of my house for me, my children, and my wife. Encourage my boys in thoughts of patriotism. Remember that always I think of you, and that is happiness enough."

The letter from Gozo was brief, but his step-mother read it greedily. It was written in the English language.

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“ESTEEMED MADAME, AND MOTHER-BY-LAW,—I know not to express myself good in your language. How I can find words begging your pardon? Put my rudeness to you down to my ignorance. I am more old to-day and through my honored father’s words I am now acquainted with your respected character. I shall never have pleasure to look upon your honorable face, for I have given my insignificant life to my Emperor, yet I write begging for your affection.

“Also I humbly asking that you will continue to show kindness to my little brothers and sisters, whom though they be unworthy, I am very sick to see. Sometimes I think all night long of that little Juji brother. Pray excuse each foolish emotion. I beg remain,

“Your filial step-son forever,  
“KURUKAWA GOZO.”

A faint, light-colored illustration of a flowering branch, possibly a plum or cherry, is visible in the background of the page. The branch extends from the top right towards the center, with several blossoms and leaves. The overall tone is soft and aged.

## XXII

THE country was ringing with the hateful news of the Kamrahn Bay incident. When a French name was mentioned, Japanese faces looked dark and bitter. Foreigners in Japan talked more about the matter than did the Japanese themselves, however, for they were silent and thought much. Nevertheless, this incident and others pierced deeply. Women, smiling strangely, told their little sons the story, and they repeated after their mothers the words: "We Japanese never forget!" In the higher classes of the schools the teachers quietly instructed their pu-

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pils of the unfriendly act of a "friendly" nation. The story-tellers in their halls enlarged upon the theme, and told the story over and over again, with greater exaggeration each time. By-and-by the news reached the ears of the Kurukawa family. Billy and Taro held a council of war.

"How to be revenged?" that was the question.

They marched up and down the little garden-path discussing the subject from every stand - point. By some unfortunate coincidence the little French boy from the neighboring street happened to pass the Kurukawa house at the fateful moment when this fierce debate was in progress. In one of those flashes that often come, even to children, Billy and Taro simultaneously recognized in him the object for just vengeance.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

With a bound Taro sprang through the garden-gate and seized the helpless and unsuspecting French boy, whom he dragged down the path. Then Taro sat upon him. Billy was jumping about wildly, throwing out his fists, and pretending to spit upon them. Taro, however, was quite calm.

"We kinnod," said he, proudly, "*both* beat thad French boy. That's nod fair."

Billy's jaw dropped. Then his face brightened.

"Say, Japan doesn't want to fight France *yet*. You leave him to *me*. They interfered in what wasn't their affair, and now America's going to do the same."

Taro shook his head.

"You be England," said he, wisely; "she our honorable ally."

"I am English, then," shrieked

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

Billy; "all our people come from England originally. Mamma said so. Let him up."

Taro reluctantly arose, permitting the crushed young Frenchman to do likewise. He was a little fellow, though past his fourteenth year. His eyes were very black and furtive, and he had a tiny little mouth that would not keep closed. Actually his face was smiling. He spoke Japanese with only slight hesitancy. His polite suggestion was that they should go to his father to borrow swords with which to fight a decent duel. The boys received this suggestion with shouts of derision. Then the little Frenchman declared he would not fight at all, and crossing his arms over his chest, told them they could murder him if they wished.

Billy surveyed him contemptuously.

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"Say, what's your name, anyhow?" he queried, after a moment.

"Alphonse Napoleon Tascherean."

"Well, what do you think of that Kamrahn Bay matter?" continued Billy, curious to know the boy's views; but Alphonse only shrugged expressive shoulders and smiled a little, subtle, sneering smile.

"D'ye remember how Taro licked you last fall?"

The French boy turned darkly red. His hands were in his pocket, and one of them suddenly flashed out. He had a knife.

"I no longer am afraid of heem," he said, contemptuously. "I will cut him up—so! if he touch me once again!"

"You will?" cried Billy. "You think *we're* afraid of your old knife? Get it, Taro."

Taro did get it, though he had a

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scratch on his hand to show how dangerous the undertaking was. Then the French boy's assured manner vanished as if by magic. Quite piteously he began to cry. At the top of his voice he shouted aloud for "Pa-pa! Pa-pa!"

"We're not going to hurt you after all," said Billy, after a moment. "We'll make you do something you'll remember. Taro, help me tie his hands first."

They secured him firmly.

"Now," ordered Billy, "you run to the house and get that old French flag you and I have been using as a mark for firing at for some time, and get a Jap flag, too."

Taro was gone but a moment, and then returned with the desired flags. These Billy took and held before the French boy.

"Now, you," said he, "if you don't

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want to stay tied up here all night, you just do what we tell you. Kiss that sun flag—right in the centre. That's the thing! What!— Ah, you will, you divil," for the French boy put his lips against the flag but a second, and then withdrew them to spit at it.

Taro had turned livid. In a flash he had seized the flag and was ramming it fiercely into the mouth of the French boy. Billy fought Taro back.

"Here, Taro! That's not fair! He's tied!"

He drew forth the flag. The dye ran down in livid streams on Alphonse's chin. He fought vainly to free his arms.

"Now, you," said Billy, "we'll let you free if you'll fight either one of us alone. But if you won't, you'd better do what we tell you. If you don't—"

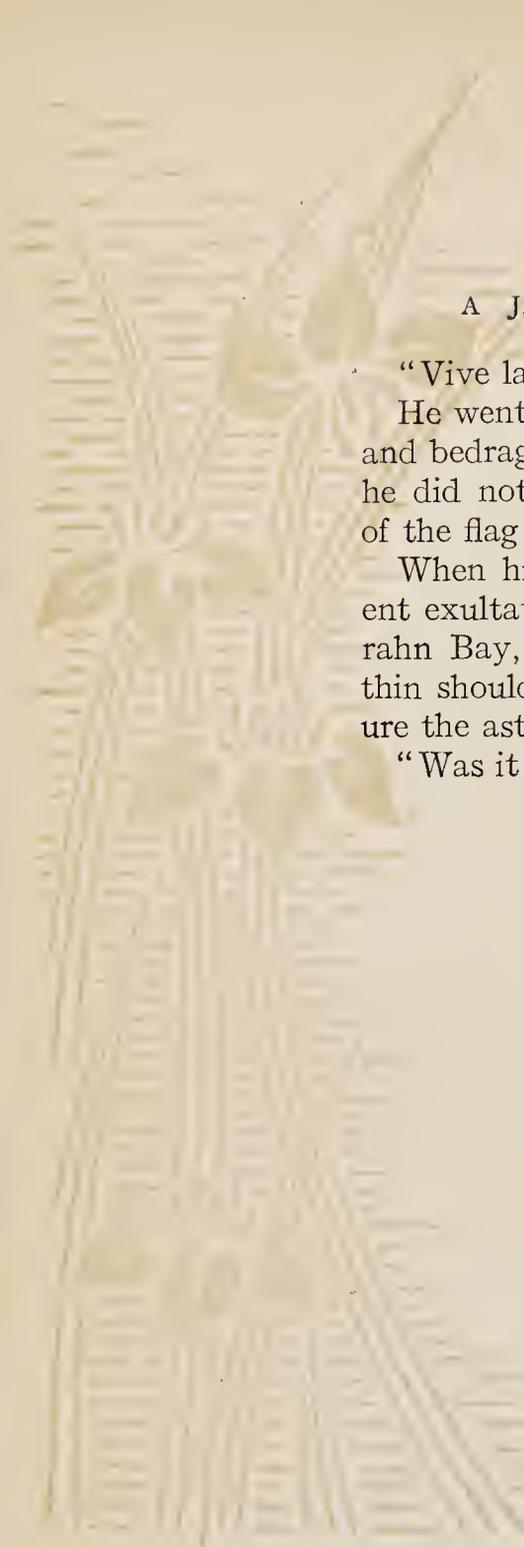
## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

Taro had quietly stripped himself to the waist prepared for battle. He was younger by several years than the French boy, but the latter had already felt the taste of the little Japanese's strength. When he encountered that bloody purpose in the eye of Taro he trembled visibly.

"I will do what you ask," he decided, suddenly.

"Good!" cried Billy. "*You* believe in spitting, eh? Well, now you just spit good and plenty at *that!*" He thrust the French flag before Alphonse, who spat at his country's flag. Then shrugging his shoulders, he swore as little boys of some nationalities do not.

Fifteen times he was forced to bow to the Japanese flag, touching each time the ground with his head. Finally he cried as instructed at the top of his voice:



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“Vive la Nippon! Banzai!”

He went home a very much wilted and bedraggled little Frenchman, but he did not tell his papa or mamma of the flag incident.

When his father read with apparent exultation further news of Kamrahn Bay, Alphonse raised his little thin shoulders and eyebrows to venture the astonishing remark:

“Was it *wise* of France, pa-pa?”

### XXIII

THERE came not many letters during the winter months to the little Kurukawa family, but the ones that did come were all the more precious. Before the first flowers of the year had begun to tint the plum-trees with their pink beauty, all Japan knew that the war would have but one ending. Victory followed victory. Instances of heroism became so frequent they could scarcely keep count of them. People, smiling, would hear the tale of a certain officer or soldier's self-sacrifice for his country, then they would say, still with that mysterious smile so com-

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mon in Japan: "He has done only what any soldier of Japan would do."

The newspapers, little, slim sheets, containing less than a quarter of the words an American newspaper would give to the war-story, seemed to drift about the empire. Everywhere they were found, everywhere people carried them.

It was in April that the *Far East* published a story of a certain act of surpassing heroism performed by a Japanese officer. Mrs. Kurukawa had seen the head-lines, and stopping in the street had bought the paper. She read it through slowly, still standing there in the street. As she stood, perfectly still, her white face tense and drawn, curious passers-by stopped to look at her, wondering what it was the foreign woman found in the paper to make her look so strangely. It was the act of

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

a child which aroused her. Passing, he lightly pulled the sleeve of her kimono. She started as if struck, the paper fluttered from her hand. Mechanically she reached for it, but a sudden wind caught it up and blew it hither and thither about the street. She stood there watching its flight until it had passed out of sight. It disappeared utterly. Surely it had never been at all, she had not really held it in her hand and read the story of her husband's terrible fate! Walking unsteadily and blindly, she started down the street.

Madame Sano came swiftly from the garden-path to meet her, for the news had reached the house in Mrs. Kurukawa's absence.

Japanese women are not demonstrative, but they are exquisitely tender. The touch of Madame Sano's hands upon her face was balm itself.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

The stricken woman's features quivered. Sobs burst from her lips, and in the other woman's arms she wept as though she had found the haven of a mother's breast. Without speaking, Madame Sano led her into the house. The children, a pitiful, frightened group, were in the hall, waiting for her. Passionately, Marion called her mother by name, and clung to her a moment, but Madame Sano gently put the little girl aside and took the mother to her room. There she induced her to lie down until she waited upon her, murmuring words in soothing Japanese. When the younger woman was calmer, Madame Sano gently spoke of the sad news. She said, in a reverent voice:

“God is good, my daughter. How gloriously he has rewarded your husband!”

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

The woman on the bed did not stir or speak. Madame Sano continued:

“Think how many families there are in Japan whose men have never had the opportunity to give such august service to their Emperor. We are fortunate indeed.”

Mrs. Kurukawa covered her face with her hands. The tears came slipping through them; helpless, silent tears which would not be held back. Her voice was choked but inexpressibly sweet:

“I know,” she said, “it is all—very—glorious—but—I will not give up hope.”

“Hope?” repeated Madame Sano. “Our best hopes are realized, my daughter. Kurukawa Kiyskichi has made the supreme sacrifice. He has given his life to his Emperor and to his country.”

Now, Mrs. Kurukawa raised her-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

self. Two spots of red appeared in her cheeks. Her eyes were feverish, her nervous fingers clasped each other spasmodically.

"I will tell you my hope—my belief. I feel, in spite of what we have heard, that my husband is not dead. I *feel* it somehow. I cannot explain. Only this I do know: he promised he would return, and he must! Oh; I am sure he will!"

Gently the old woman spoke, smoothing the hands of the other woman as she did so.

"My child, he will truly return to you as he has promised. All Japanese soldiers expect to return to their wives, but in the spirit!"

Mrs. Kurukawa drew her hands passionately away.

"That was not his meaning," she said.

Madame Sano shook her head sadly.

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"Ah, my child, be reconciled to the august inevitable."

There was a smile upon the pale lips of the younger woman.

"You do not understand my faith," she said, "and I cannot explain it. When I read that story in the street I felt as if something had struck me. I tried to push it from me with my hands, and I do not know how I found my way home. I still feel as if I had been hurt and bruised in some way, and yet I know—I feel—that it is not true—that he is—dead."

Her voice whispered the word, and for a long interval there was silence in the room. Then she said, slowly: "It is a mistake—a horrible mistake. God give us courage to bear the mistake. But that is all it is."

"You do not believe the story of

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

your husband's magnificent heroism?"

"I do believe it."

"Then you must admit that he has passed away. Is it not clearly stated that after he had saved almost the entire division that was caught in the ambush that he himself was struck down and his body carried away by the Russians, for what purposes can only be surmised?"

Mrs. Kurukawa was silent. After a while she arose, and, though her hands were trembling, she dressed herself afresh with calmness. Madame Sano watched her in silence.

After a while she asked:

"You are going out?"

"Yes, to learn what I can. If necessary I will go again to Tokio, leaving the children with you."

The old woman nodded.

"They will make an honorable

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

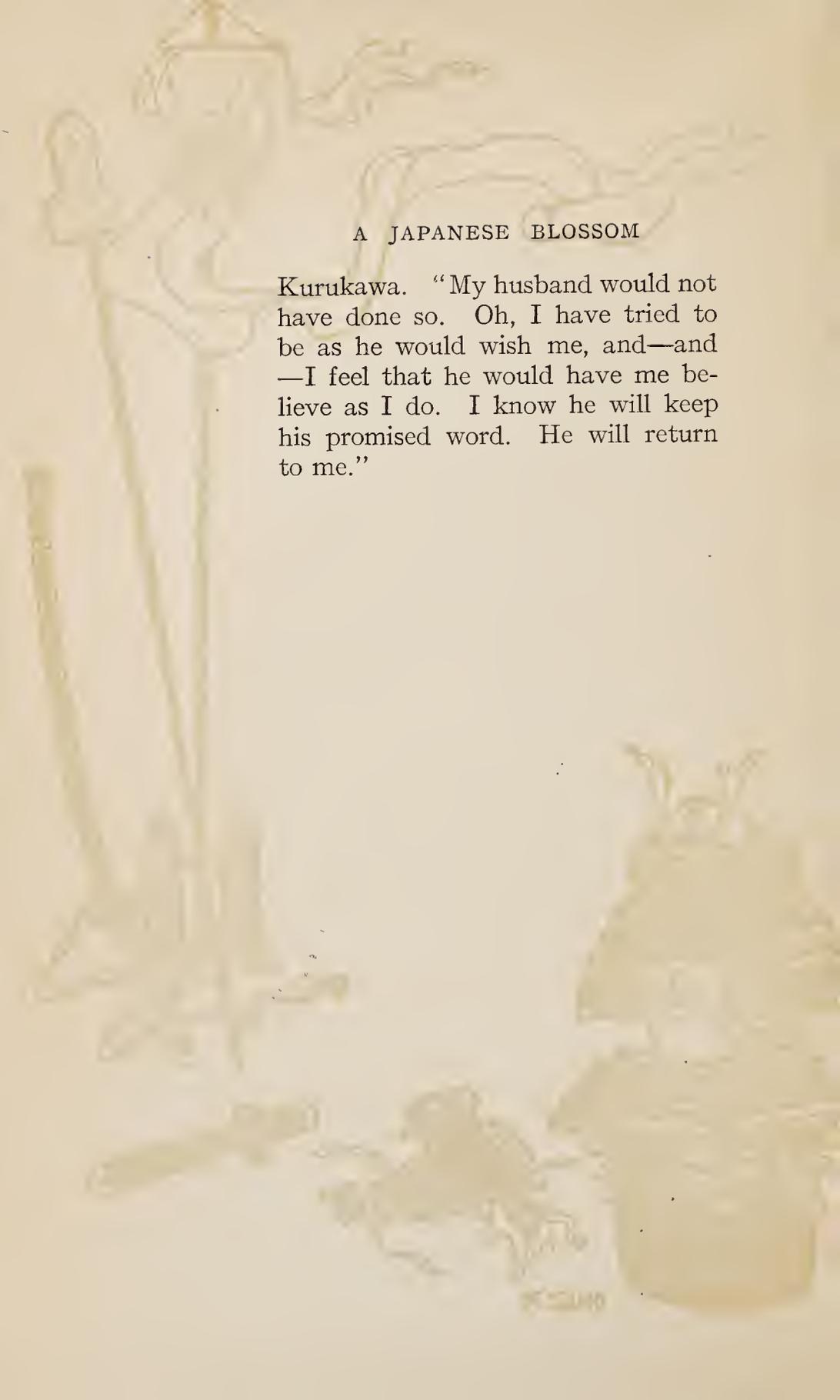
effort," she said, "to obtain possession of your husband's body, and he will be given an exalted funeral. 'He died gloriously for Dai Nippon' will say all loyal Japanese."

Mrs. Kurukawa smiled wearily.

"He is not dead," she said. "Do not, dear Madame Sano, rob me of my hope. I want to be courageous, for while I feel he is not gone truly from me, I do not know what may have befallen him. It may be that he is wounded—sick—tortured—a prisoner. Oh, I cannot bear to think of it!"

"Better, my child," urged the old woman, gently, "to believe he is at rest. Cherish not false hopes. Ah, had you been a true daughter of Japan, you would have looked for, expected, and even hailed this bereavement, but—"

"Do not reproach me," cried Mrs.



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Kurukawa. "My husband would not have done so. Oh, I have tried to be as he would wish me, and—and—I feel that he would have me believe as I do. I know he will keep his promised word. He will return to me."

## XXIV

TWO weeks later the mail for Tokio contained several pathetic epistles. Most of them were written in the wandering, crude, yet peculiarly attractive handwriting of little children. Mrs. Kurukawa read them over and over again, crying softly as she did so.

“DARLING MAMMA,—Do please let us come to you in Tokio. You do not know how sad we are without you. Little girls have little hearts, but I know that they can suffer much, just the same. Grandmother, too, is very sad, and Norah is crying, ‘Wirrah, wirrah, wirrah!’ all the time, and, oh, mamma, she says she hears the banshee every night wailing outside

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

our house. Grandmother says it's only that old gray cat of Summer's. You probably remember her. But Norah says it is the banshee, and it means that some one in our family is dead. Oh, mamma, *how* it made me cry! Grandmother has made us all the strangest-looking kimonos. They are of black crêpe, and I cannot bear to put mine on. She says that black is not the mourning color in Japan, but we must wear black in honor of you, mamma, because black crêpe is mourning in America. So yesterday we all went to church in those black kimonos, and everybody stared at us, and I put my head down on the pew, and cried and cried. Plum Blossom and Iris also hid their faces, and though they say *they* did not cry, I think they did, for their eyes were all red. Everybody treats us as if we were great people. In church they all bowed so deeply to us as we went in. Sometimes the men we meet on the street will cheer when they see us. Taro says it is because father did such heroic things. Taro has no heart, I sometimes think, for he seems to be proud and happy that

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

father is gone, and he says he wishes he could have the chance to do what father did. Billy is very serious these days. He thinks he ought to be with you in Tokio, to take care of you and protect you. Oh, dear mamma, do let us know all the news you hear, and if we cannot come to you, *please*, please come home to us soon.

“Your affectionate and loving,  
“MARION.”

“BELOVED DAUGHTER-IN-LAW,—I hope that your health is excellent and that you will return home soon. The servants weep for their okusama (honorable lady of the house). The children are awfully sad without you. Billy has lost his appetite for food. He has the pale face got. When I request, ‘Are you ill, Billy?’ he makes reply, in boy rough way, ‘No, but I ought to be with my mother.’ Marion spoils her pretty eyes with too much weep. She and Juji weep enough tears for all the honorable family. Plum Blossom does all your work most neatly, and is learning excellently to be a good house-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

keeper. You chose wisely to put her in your place, and she feels proudly your august confidence in her. Iris assists her in all things, but neither does she appear in good health. She has too much paleness in the face also. Taro is a great comfort. His father's heroism has inspired him with noble ambitions. He is a worthy son, though young. The baby has more words to say each day. Yesterday she spoke of the white moon which appeared in the sky while it was yet day as "ball," and she said, 'It is too high!' Those are many words for one so young. She has her august mother's eyes.

"Excellent daughter-in-law, I beseech you to earnestly seek details concerning the fate of our beloved Gozo. It is said in some of the papers that he did accompany his father upon this expedition. I entreat you to think first of all of your august health and happiness. I sign myself, Your unworthy mother-in-law,

"SANO-OTAMA."

"DEAR MOTHER,—Since father is dead, I ought to take care of you. I think

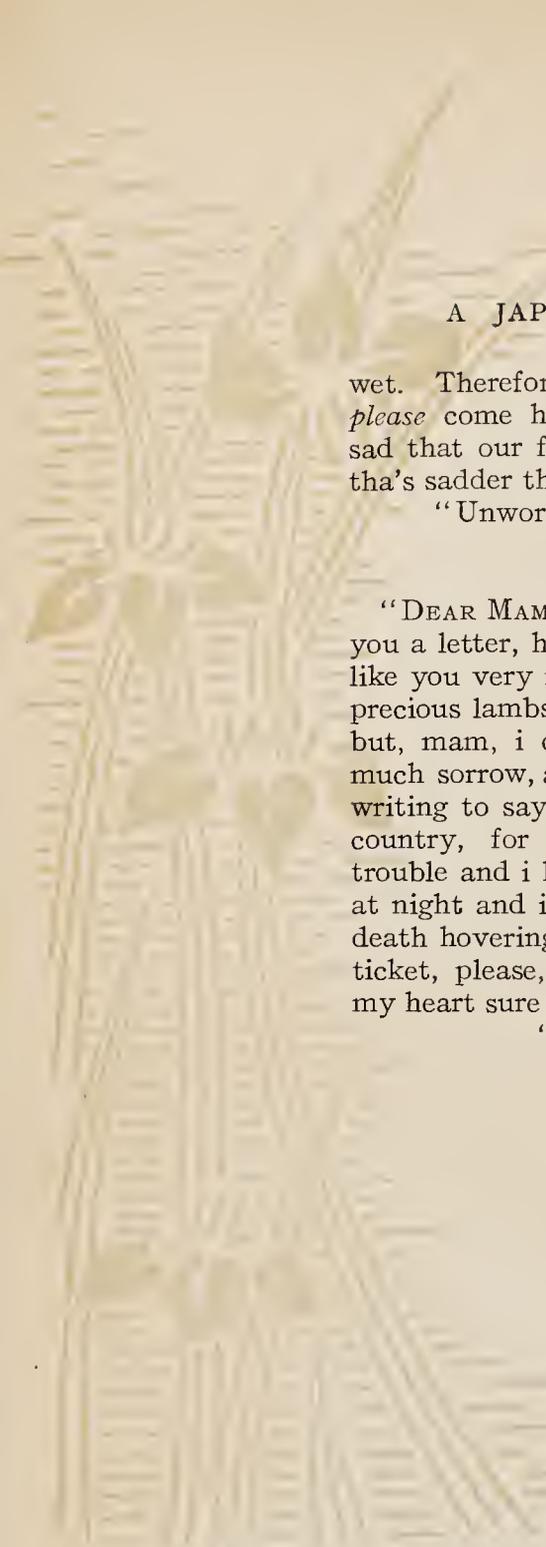
## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

about it all the time and want to come to you. I don't think it right for a woman to be alone, and I must come to you at once. Taro and I have not felt like doing anything lately. I don't know what's the matter with everything. The house doesn't seem the same without you. I can't write much. I want to be with you, mother.

“Your boy,  
“BILLY.”

“ESTEEMED MOTHER,—The plum-trees have much buds again got now, but very sad they make us this year. I think only of those cherry blossoms we did see with our honorable father. They are so like the plum. Billy says they make him sick if he look upon those trees. So we go not out much, as it makes so sorrow in the hearts to see those same trees shine.

“Earnestly I endeavor to follow your honorable counsel about the house, and it is unworthily clean to your honor. I am become like Marion. Always my eyes those tears in them when I think about you, and several times I make my pillow



A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

wet. Therefore I praying until you *please* come home with us. Tha's very sad that our father die and go way, but tha's sadder that we lose our mother also.

“Unworthy and insignificant,  
“PLUM BLOSSOM.”

“DEAR MAM,—I thought I would write you a letter, hoping that you are well. i like you very much, mam, and i love the precious lambs, both the babby and Juji, but, mam, i cannot bear any longer so much sorrow, and it's a letter to you i'm writing to say i must go back to the old country, for i cannot bear so much trouble and i have heard the banshee cry at night and it's afraid i am that there's death hovering about. Will you buy my ticket, please, mam? And it's breaking my heart sure to leave you and the lambs.

“Respectfully,  
“NORAH O'MALLEY.”

## XXV

THE letters brought the mother back to her home. She had altered strangely in the two months she had been in the city. Always slim, she seemed now a mere shadow of a woman—slight and frail as if a breath would blow her away. But the thin face still retained its gentle sweetness of expression and the eyes held that smile of hope.

The children were glad to see her. Laughing and crying they clung to her.

“Why,” she said, as if she had only just realized it, “what a lot there is to live for!”

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

“Seven of us, mother,” said Marion; “no, eight!—for there’s Gozo, too.”

She took no one into her confidence, but began, in secret, a correspondence with the Minister of War. All of her inquiries were answered. In Japan her husband had not been without high influence, and his heroism had made his name revered by all Japanese. Hence the requests of his widow were given the greatest attention. Soon they had reached the highest authorities. Orders went straight to the field of action. At last there came a day when she knew that a special search was to be made for her husband—dead or alive.

The Russians would tell if he were with them. If not, then, at least, his body must be found. Such were the orders issued from a high place.

She was like a flower opening to

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

the sunshine and spring rain. The color came back to her pale cheeks and lips. Back also came the light of health to her eyes. She moved like a new person.

The assurance that no stone would be left unturned to learn her husband's fate, and her strange faith that he was still alive, invigorated her. The change effected in her rapidly spread to the entire household. Gloom slipped out of the door and sunshine ventured in with summer. And this is as it should be in the house of children.

While the cherry blossoms were still flying like myriad pink-and-white birds in the skies and all the mossy ground was white with the flowery carpet blown from the trees, the family went out once again on a flower picnic.

In the same little flowery gowns,

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

the sleeve-wings weighted with petals, they started gayly for the picnic grounds where "father" had taken them only a year before. A gentle melancholy which pervaded even the youngest of them, at the memory of that absent one, was dispersed with the mother's thought!

"Father would have you happy to-day, children. This is *his* day, darlings. So be happy."

And so they were. They played the games popular in Japan, engaged in the fascinating sport of kite-flying, listened with eager ears to the tales of the grandfather, and then, sleepy, homeward bound in their jinrikishas, lazily attacked passing festival-makers with the petals, to be smothered in turn with the flowery shower.

When they reached home it was gloaming. Norah made the discovery that most of the children were asleep.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"Shure," said the girl, "they're all babbies, mam, just look at the darlints," and she indicated the heads of the three little girls all resting asleep on the back of the seat. Marion was in the middle with a hand of each step-sister in her own. Mrs. Kurukawa stood silently looking at them, then Norah interrupted her thoughts again.

"Did you think, ma'am, I'd have the heart to leave them?"

"I hoped not, Norah," she answered, gently, "but I know it has been hard for you, and you are a good girl."

She helped the Irish girl lift the sleeping Juji from the carriage. As a maid from the house came to the jinrikisha Mrs. Kurukawa turned to direct her to assist Norah. Something in the girl's face startled her. The usual impassive expression was

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

gone, and in the dim light of the evening her mistress saw the silent tears rolling down her face.

"Why are you crying, Natsu?" she said. "Are you in trouble?"

The girl shook her head.

"What is it? You are unhappy about something."

Suddenly the girl slipped to the ground and buried her face in the folds of her mistress's kimono. Madame Sano drew her almost roughly away.

"What is it?" she demanded, harshly, in Japanese. "It is unseemly to act so in the okusama's presence. Keep your troubles for your own chamber."

"But I have no troubles," said the girl, rising and wiping her eyes with her sleeves. "I w-weep because I am happy."

She brought the last word out with

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

such hysterical vehemence that she woke the older sleepers. They sat up, looking about them, startled from their dreams. But Mrs. Kurakawa shook the girl by the arm. Her voice was hoarse.

"What is it, Natsu? Tell me quickly!"

For answer the girl turned towards the house and pointed to the silent figure standing there by the doorway. Even in the twilight the Japanese children knew him. They jumped tumblingly from the jinrikishas and ran towards him, calling his name aloud:

"Gozo! Gozo! Gozo!"

Mrs. Kurakawa turned and blindly followed the children.

He put the clinging children aside from him and advanced a step towards her. Then suddenly he stopped short, standing uncertainly. She

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

spoke with a note of irresistible appeal in her voice.

“Oh, you bring me news of my husband—your father!” she said.

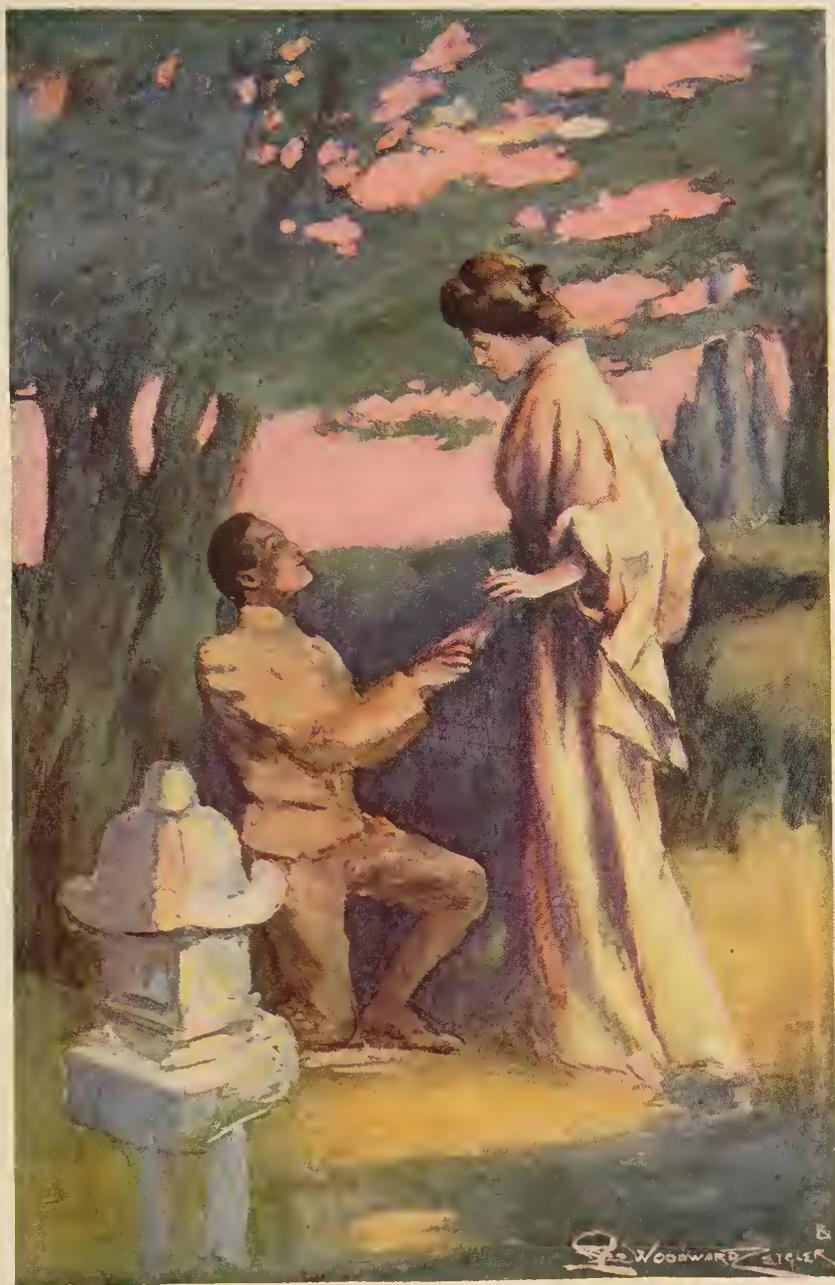
He made a sort of smothered sound; then, with a movement strangely reminiscent of his father, he seized her hand suddenly in his own and fell on his knees before her.

“Good news — for good woman!” he said.

“He is alive!” she cried.

“In Japan—the hospital at Saseho. I unworthily brought him home on—”

He noticed that her hand fell feebly from his. Then he caught her as she reeled. She had fainted.



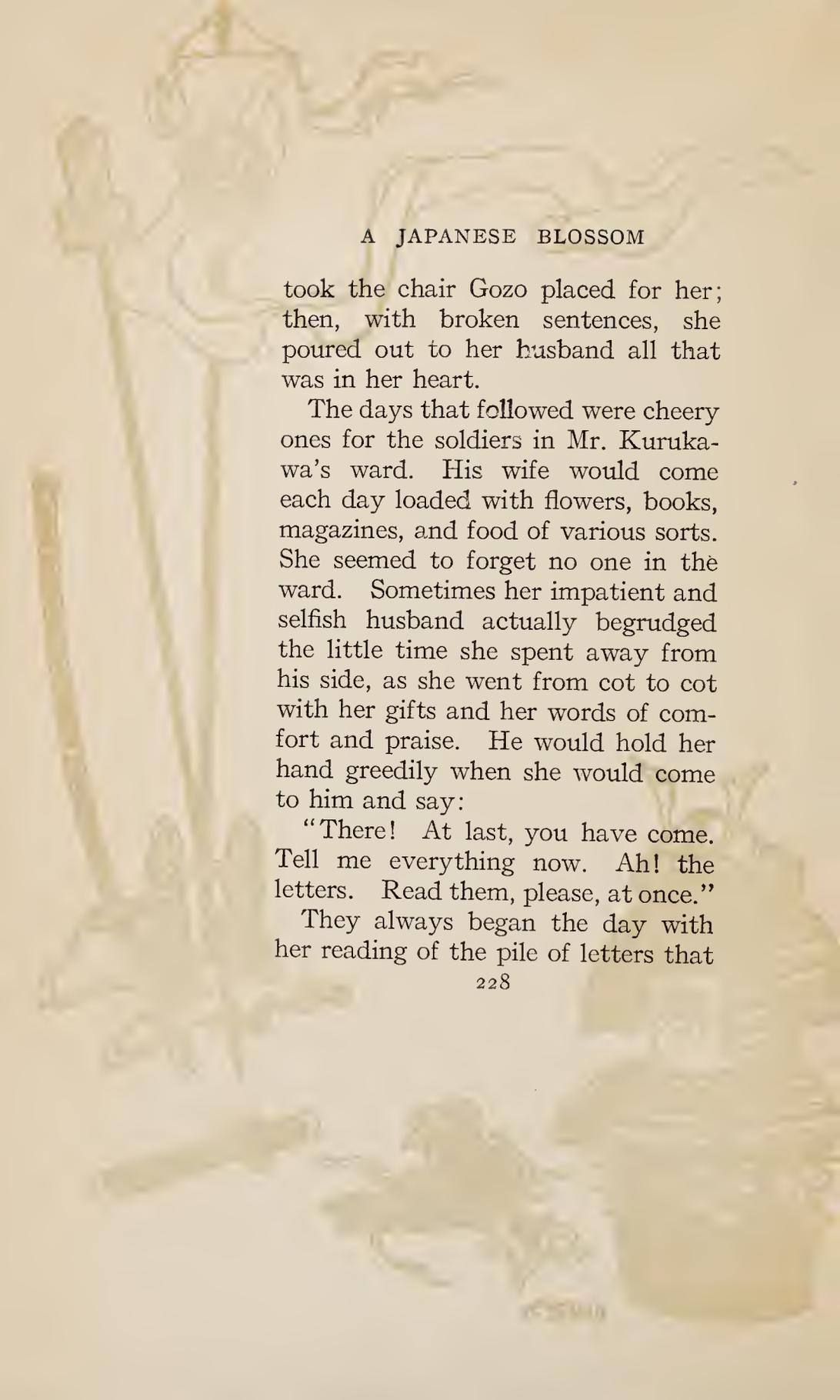
“ HE SEIZED HER HAND SUDDENLY IN HIS OWN AND FELL ON HIS KNEES BEFORE HER ”



## XXVI

THE following morning Mrs. Kurukawa was with her husband, having travelled all night, accompanied by Gozo. He had known she would come. When she approached his bed he raised himself on his elbow and greeted her cheerily, with an airy wave of his arm. When she saw his dear, familiar face, with the kindly smile lighting up the features, she rushed with an inward sob towards him. She could not speak, so deep were the emotions that assailed her, but she clung to his hand as he whispered to her.

Later, when she was calmer, she



## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

took the chair Gozo placed for her; then, with broken sentences, she poured out to her husband all that was in her heart.

The days that followed were cheery ones for the soldiers in Mr. Kurukawa's ward. His wife would come each day loaded with flowers, books, magazines, and food of various sorts. She seemed to forget no one in the ward. Sometimes her impatient and selfish husband actually begrudged the little time she spent away from his side, as she went from cot to cot with her gifts and her words of comfort and praise. He would hold her hand greedily when she would come to him and say:

"There! At last, you have come. Tell me everything now. Ah! the letters. Read them, please, at once."

They always began the day with her reading of the pile of letters that

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

came from the impatient children at home.

Taro wanted his father's sword sent, unwashed, by express. If he waited until they returned home he feared that some one might steal the precious weapon in the interval. Of course, Gozo, as the eldest son, was rightfully entitled to the sword, but he had a sword of his own already, and Taro had none. If his father would only give him this one he would swear by it to use it only in glorious service. Billy, apparently inspired at his step-brother's request, wrote an eloquent plea for his father's rifle. If his father could spare his uniform, which must be all ragged and worn from bullet wounds and blood, Billy would cherish it as his choicest possession. Marion's epistles were always blurred by tear marks. They were sometimes al-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

most undecipherable. Because the invalid insisted on hearing every word she had written, Mrs. Kurukawa usually spent more time over her letters than any of the other children's. The little girl was given to dissecting her inmost emotions. Her letters were usually a recital of how she felt when she heard this and that about her dear, dear, *dear*, brave father, whom she loved so much.

Plum Blossom wrote pages of flowery words. The father had simply made a bird of her, she said. She wanted to sing and laugh all the time. She had a calendar on which she chalked off each day the date, so she could keep count of the days until her father would return. The baby had fallen down the stairs, she wrote, but the floor, fresh padded with rice-paper, in anticipation of the

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

return of "father," was so soft that she only bounced when she reached the bottom. When Norah had picked her up the baby had actually laughed, and said: "Coco faw down." The baby could make long sentences now. She could even say a prayer Marion had taught her, but she was very rude, and often said "Amen" right in the middle.

There were three soldiers in the town, and everybody was making a great fuss over them. Miss Summer had said she wished she could marry one of them, which showed she had no sense, since Gozo already was a soldier. Anyhow, the soldiers never deigned to look at little girls, and they only marched by the Kurukawa house because they wanted to see Norah, who said they were "small, but grand!"

Iris's letters brimmed over with

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

the same expressions of love and entreaties for the quick return of her parents.

Finally, there came an extraordinary little document penned by Juji. It was written in English, apparently under the direction of the faithful Norah, for at the bottom of the sheet she had written:

“If you please, mam, it was Norah that taught the little lad to write the beautiful letter.”

Beautiful it was to the eye of the fond father. Every letter was printed and loving words misspelled. There were three smudges of ink on the page. One distinct little mark, where a dirty little finger had rested for a moment, pleased him.

“Do you know,” said Mrs. Kurukawa, very earnestly, “I would still be in Tokio if it had not been for

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the children's letters. They used to come in every mail—little, soiled epistles of love, all bearing their childish pleas for mother to return. Why, I could not stay away from them. They just drew me back."

Her husband looked at her fondly.

"What a *mother* you are!" he said.

"Yes," said she, "that's my strongest trait—maternity. I love all children. There's nothing sweeter in the world than baby arms about one's neck, baby voices, baby kisses, baby touches. Oh, they are the most precious things in life!"

He looked a trifle injured.

"You think more of babies than of husbands, then."

She laughed with the tears in her eyes.

"Why, husbands are the biggest babies of all!" she said. "I've al-

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ways felt like a mother to you, you know."

"You have?"

She nodded brightly.

"Don't you know what first appealed to me in you?"

"No."

"Well, it was your utter loneliness in a strange country. You seemed so strangely alone in America, and you wanted so much to be friendly. I saw it in your face."

"Yes, I did want to be friendly—with you," he admitted, gravely.

"You did not find it hard, did you?" she asked, still smiling.

"Yes, I did."

"Why, I gave you every encouragement."

"I know, but still I could not know that."

Gozo came into the ward, and, joining them, tossed upon the bed a

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

number of newspapers and periodicals.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, noting their smiling expressions.

Blushing like a girl, the wife looked at her husband shyly.

"We were talking about our courtship days, my son," said Mr. Kurukawa.

"Ah," said Gozo, very seriously, "it makes one happy to think of those times, does it?"

"Very, very happy," said his stepmother.

Gozo sighed.

"I cannot understand why," he said, simply.

## XXVII

“**H**URRY down to Takashima, Taro, and tell him he must send us without fail two large cases of the best and brightest fire-flies. Now, remember, they must be delivered by to-morrow morning at latest.”

“Can’t we bring them back, grandma?” queried Taro.

“No, oh no, you might break the netting and the flies escape. Where is Beely?”

“Here I am, gam,” answered the boy from his place on the back piazza. He was engaged in pasting carefully in a scrap-book several newspaper pictures of his step-father.

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"Beely," said Madame Sano, speaking now in English, "you must go down to the river and get all the white pebbles and shells you can find. Fill up your sleeves full."

"Aw right, gam," said the boy, obediently, though he left his fascinating book reluctantly.

"What d'ye want with them, gam?"

"For the flower-beds I desire. You would not have them look shabby when your honorable father comes."

Billy sauntered off on his errand, whistling, overtook Taro, and they raced down the street, Taro in the lead.

"Marion!" the grandmother called up the little stairway. In answer to the call she came running.

"Yes, gramma."

"Where's those bamboo palms?"

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"I'll get them. Do you want them now?"

"Ride away."

"All right."

Madame Sano took them from her and showed the little girl how to dust the eaves with them.

"Bamboo means long life," she explained. "I always clean the house with them, and the gods will deign long life to give."

"The gods!" gasped Marion, reproachfully. "Oh, grandmamma!"

Madame Sano's withered little face turned rosy. She had been from girlhood a Christian, as she was proud to say.

"I speak, my child," she explained, "only poetically, not religiously."

"Oh," said Marion, dubiously; then after a moment of silent work she stopped and regarded the old woman earnestly.

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"Dear grandma, you *aren't* a heathen, are you?"

"Dear grandma" grunted, but went on with her work, her little old face puckered into a rather disdainful expression.

"*Are* you, grandma?" pleaded Marion.

"Little girls make foolish question," she answered finally, crossly.

"Well, *are* you a Christian, dear grandma?" persisted Marion.

"Certainly I am," replied the old lady, with dignity.

Marion kissed her impulsively, whereupon she declared that the little girl was honorably rude, and no help at all.

"Join your sisters for flowers," she ordered.

"Shall we want so many flowers for the house, grandma?" asked Marion.

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"No, no, no. Only one small bunch for house."

"Then why—?"

"The flowers are for the honorable picnic booth. It must have plenty."

"O—o-h! Why, grandma, it's just covered heavy with wistarias now—"

"Such a talk-child! Hush! Go at once."

The little girl obeyed this time, though she thrust a mischievous face back between the shoji for a moment.

"Grandma," she called, "I'm going to take a wagon along and fill it. Will that be enough?"

"Go, go, naughty one!" and the naughty one fled.

On this day the Kurukawa house seemed alive with busy ones. In every room some one was moving about. Many of the old servants had been recalled. From the top to the bottom of the house work was in

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

progress. The shoji of the entire upper floor had been pushed aside, making a sort of roofed pavilion of this upper level. The little balconies were heaped with flowers and green trailing vines were threaded in and out among the railings. The long, bare expanse of exquisite matted floor needed no relief of furniture. This cool interior was the most attractive place imaginable. From all sides the breezes swept in, making it delightfully cool. Madame Sano bustled about the place throwing mats about.

Here the family would dine this day. The outlook was picturesque, for one could see the blooming country and the blue fields and hills, and nestling in its heart the little village.

This was the floor on which the children slept. It was only the work of a few minutes to slip the sliding-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

walls back into place again. Japanese beds need no making. On the second floor Madame Sano had been most busy. How the chamber of the okusama shone! The long, white, foreign bed seemed not at all out of place in the room. It was the only furniture Mrs. Kurukawa had brought with her. She used the little toilet-boxes of Japan, and there were several bamboo chairs and one small rocker her husband had bought for her in Yokohama.

The room was sweet with the odor of some faint perfume. Perhaps it was only the sandal-wood of the toilet-boxes, or the odor of sweet-smelling incense which had recently been burned to purify the house. There was not a speck of dust on the floor. Even Madame Sano, from whose sharp little eyes nothing seemed to escape, seemed satisfied as she

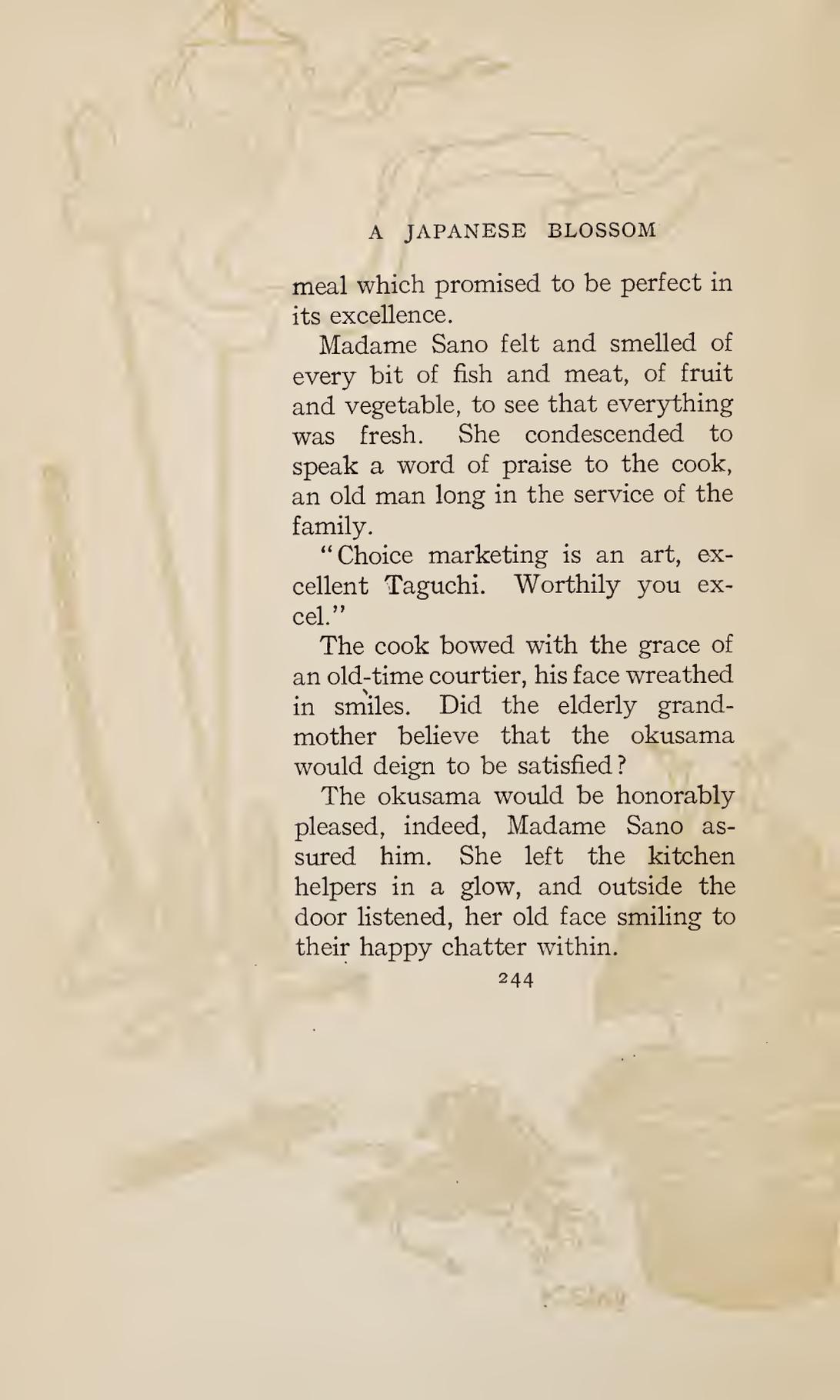
## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

drew the sliding-doors in place and descended to the lower floor.

In the guest-room a maid was polishing something round and dark golden in color. It was very ancient and beautiful, an old hibachi, highly prized by the master of the house. A serving-boy stood waiting at the tokonoma. He handed Madame Sano reverently the things he had brought from the go-down.

She did not put the kakemono in place, but left it on a stand, for there was much else to see before she could spare the time for the tokonoma, always the last and pleasantest task. Besides, she had promised Plum Blossom the task of flower arrangement in the ancient house, and the hanging of the scroll.

A visit to the kitchen revealed the fact that the cook and four assistants were deep in the preparation of a



## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

meal which promised to be perfect in its excellence.

Madame Sano felt and smelled of every bit of fish and meat, of fruit and vegetable, to see that everything was fresh. She condescended to speak a word of praise to the cook, an old man long in the service of the family.

“Choice marketing is an art, excellent Taguchi. Worthily you excel.”

The cook bowed with the grace of an old-time courtier, his face wreathed in smiles. Did the elderly grandmother believe that the okusama would deign to be satisfied?

The okusama would be honorably pleased, indeed, Madame Sano assured him. She left the kitchen helpers in a glow, and outside the door listened, her old face smiling to their happy chatter within.

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One said:

"Hah! the master always liked his fish just so. If I give one more beat to the fish it will be spoiled. These cakes are ready now for frying."

"The master," said another, "has not eaten civilized food for many moons. These rice-balls will water his palate."

A woman's voice broke in shrilly.

"Okusama will ask for the sugar-coated beans first of all. Look at these, fresh as if growing. Think of the pleasure of her tongue."

"Talk less, work more," came the admonishing voice of the old chief cook. For a moment there was silence, then a woman's voice broke into song, and the song she sang was of war, furious, glorious war!

## XXVIII

JUST before the noon hour the train bearing the Kurukawas arrived. They were unprepared for the reception. The towns - people had gathered at the station. When Mr. Kurukawa, pale, but able to walk alone, appeared on the platform, a murmur which rapidly became a cheer arose from the crowd. Old friends and neighbors rushed forward to greet him. He was overwhelmed by the storm of banzais and cheers. The Japanese people do not often give way in this fashion, but in these times they let themselves loose, and they shouted now with all the pent-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

up enthusiasm of months. Their heroes were sacred objects to them—to look at them even was an honor. How proud the little town had become! Did they not boast as a citizen one of the bravest heroes of the war? The gods had singled them out for the peculiar honor. Grateful and proud indeed they felt. Always a modest man by nature, the homage offered Mr. Kurukawa now almost distressed him. Indeed, his face showed bewilderment and embarrassment. Respectfully the people permitted his son to lead him to the waiting jinrikisha. The crowds impeded the progress of the vehicles, which they followed all the way to the house.

At the house everything was ready for the reception. The children were in their gayest clothes. All were rosy with excitement. About them ev-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

everything seemed to shine. Madame Sano, old as she was, made quite a picture. Her withered old cheeks were pink with pride.

They were all waiting there in the hall. Hard by, the servants in their best attire waited also.

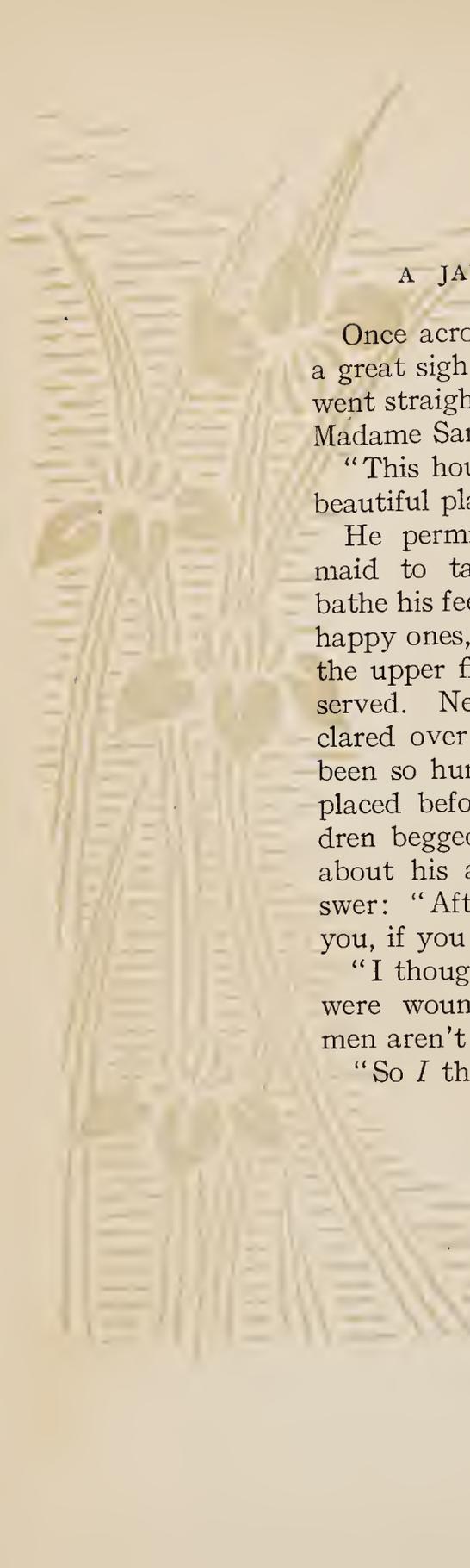
"It's after twelve already," said Billy, consulting for the twentieth time his Christmas watch. "They're late."

"I hear sounds," said Taro, his ears pinched up like a small dog's.

Taro rushed to the shoji, and before his grandmother could prevent him he had thrust his fist through the beautiful new paper upon it. Billy, however, made a rush for the door, forgetting in one moment all the grandmother's injunctions concerning the "dignified and most refined" reception due at such a time. Billy's departure seemed to affect the girls. They looked at one another in hesi-

## A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

tation. Then almost with one accord they followed their brother's lead, dragging little Juji along with them. Down the garden-path they sped, stocking-footed, for they had not stayed to put on clogs. Billy and Taro pushed through the gate ruthlessly. Down the road they dashed. A moment later they were in the midst of the crowd following and cheering their father. They shouted as they ran and waved their arms wildly above their heads. Mr. Kurukawa saw them while still a distance off, and suddenly arose in his seat. Unmindful of the crowd, he gave an answering shout to the boys. How he reached the house he never could remember. His wife told him afterwards that the children seemed to fall upon him at once. They clung about his legs, his hands, and his waist.



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Once across the threshold, he gave a great sigh. Then in a voice which went straight to the very heart of old Madame Sano, he said:

"This house seems to be the most beautiful place on earth."

He permitted an excited, happy maid to take off his sandals and bathe his feet. Then followed by the happy ones, he ascended the stairs to the upper floor, where the meal was served. Never in his life, he declared over and over again, had he been so hungry. He ate everything placed before him. When the children begged to be told this or that about his adventures he would answer: "After dinner. Talk, all of you, if you wish, but let *me* eat."

"I thought," said Billy, "that you were wounded, and that wounded men aren't allowed to eat so much."

"So *I* thought in Saseho, my boy.

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

We ate not much in Manchuria, but we famished in the hospital."

"Honorable father, why did you not send me that sword?" queried Taro.

"I had none to send, my son. It was lost."

"And the rifle, too, father?" asked Billy.

"The rifle, too."

"But what about the uniform?"

"Well, it was, as you thought, torn and worn from service. The Russians gave me a new one."

"What!" cried Billy, in horror, "a Russian uniform!"

Mr. Kurukawa smiled.

"Hardly that, my boy. You see a sick man on a stretcher usually wears a — er — nightie — isn't that what they call it?"

"Oh-h!" said Taro and Billy both together, apparently disappointed.

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"If they put a Russian uniform on me," growled Taro, "I would tear it off!"

Billy's eyes rolled.

"Hm! They'd never get one on me!" said he.

"What did they put on you, Gozo?" asked Taro, turning to his brother.

"Yes," added Billy. "You weren't wounded."

"Neither was my uniform," smiled Gozo. "They permitted me to retain my honorable garment."

"Huh! Well, did they torture you?"

"No—oh no."

"Not even knout you?"

"No. They were augustly kind—sometimes."

"Sometimes!" repeated Billy, excitedly. "Then some other times they were cruel, huh?"

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

“Not exactly, but — well, there were many things we thought reasonable to ask for, and they did not argee with us.”

“What things?”

Gozo looked at his father. The latter, still eating, nodded to him to continue.

“Well, sometimes we begged for letters to be sent to our friends.”

“And they wouldn’t—”

“They would take our letters, but they did not send them. Our people permitted Russian prisoners to write to their friends. Not always were the Japanese allowed to do so.”

“But on the whole,” put in Mrs. Kurukawa, gently, “they treated you kindly, did they not?”

Gozo’s face was inscrutable. Then after a slight silence he answered, gravely:

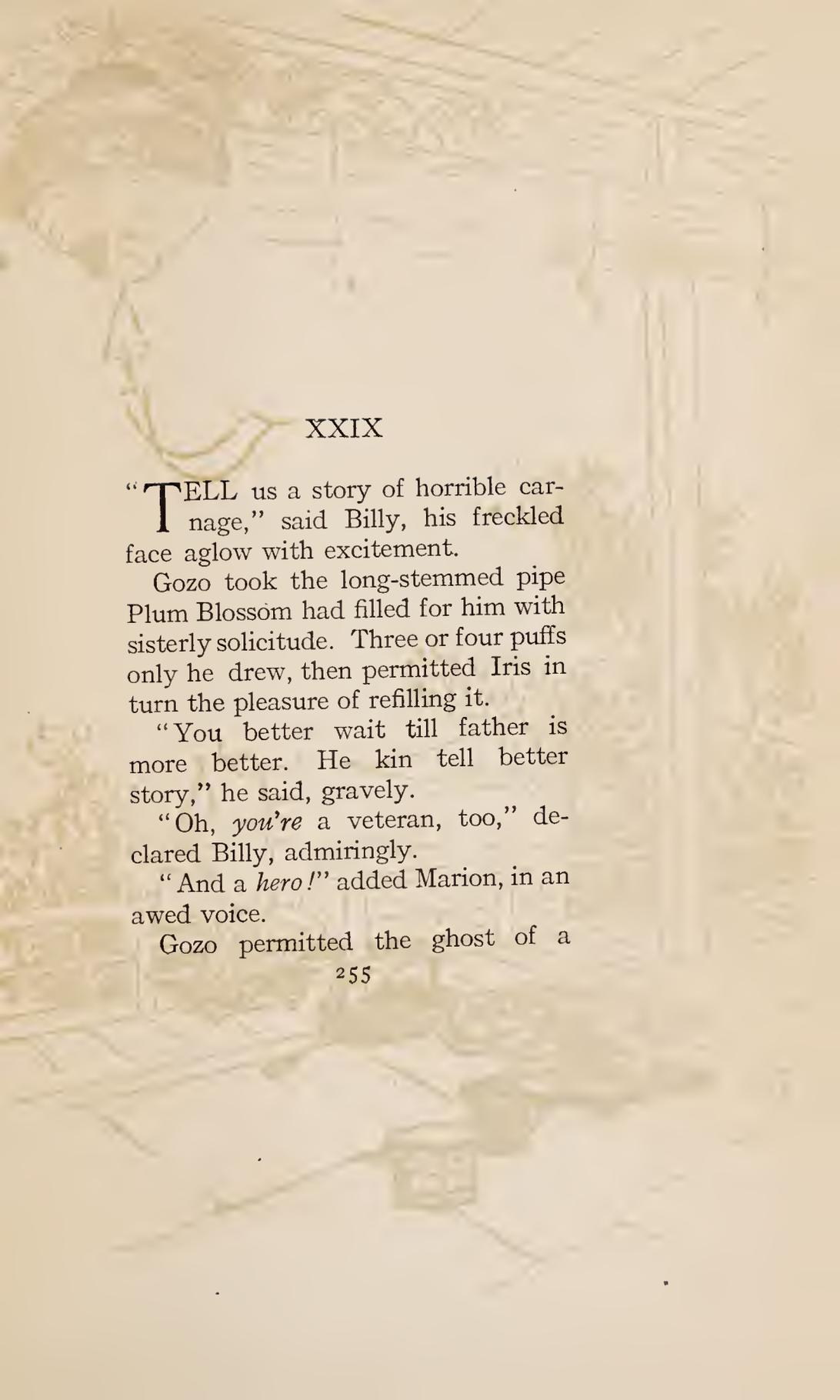
A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"We were prisoners, madame — mother—not guests."

"I bet they herded you together like cattle!" cried Billy, indignantly.

Gozo and his father exchanged smiles.

"Hardly," said Mr. Kurukawa. "There were not enough Japanese prisoners to 'herd,' you know."



XXIX

“TELL us a story of horrible carnage,” said Billy, his freckled face aglow with excitement.

Gozo took the long-stemmed pipe Plum Blossom had filled for him with sisterly solicitude. Three or four puffs only he drew, then permitted Iris in turn the pleasure of refilling it.

“You better wait till father is more better. He kin tell better story,” he said, gravely.

“Oh, *you’re* a veteran, too,” declared Billy, admiringly.

“And a *hero!*” added Marion, in an awed voice.

Gozo permitted the ghost of a

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

smile to flicker across the tranquillity of his face.

"In liddle while," said Plum Blossom, smiling happily, "father coming down into garden. He'll tell story then."

"He naever tell story 'bout his own self," said Taro, discontentedly. "He mos' greatest hero of all. Tha's right, Gozo?"

Gozo nodded gravely.

"Mos' of all," he agreed.

"'Cept *you*," said Marion, still bent on hero worship.

Gozo smiled in the little girl's direction. His usually impassive face was strangely winning when he smiled. Marion went closer to him, and, taking her hand, put it fondly against his cheek.

"You see, Gozo," she said, "I used to think about you as a hero even before father went away."

A JAPANESE BLOSSOM

"Yes," said Billy, disgustedly, "she thinks you're a greater hero than Togo even."

"But Miss Summer—she say that you better have die," put in Taro.

"Yes," said Gozo, sighing, "it was my misfortune not to get killed."

"Oh, don't, don't! Just think how unhappy we would all have been if you had never come home," said tender-hearted Marion, "and think what you'd have missed—never to have seen us—mother and Billy and the baby and me."

Gozo admitted that their acquaintance certainly was worth living for.

"Our *acquaintance!*" said Marion, reproachfully; "our *love* you should say. We love you, Gozo."

"Then if you love Gozo why you nod waid upon him like unto Iris an' me?" queried Plum Blossom. "See how we fill up thad pipe mebbe

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twenty-one times, an' also we bring wiz tea—”

“An' also I fan him,” added Iris, suiting the action to the words.

For a moment Marion looked very thoughtful.

“I know,” she said, “that you love him, too, but even if I just talk to him, I can love him just the same. Can't I, Gozo?”

“Yes, but you only love me for mebbe liddle w'ile. Then soon's my father come you desert me. Tha's same thing with Plum Blossom and Iris. Me? I am grade hero when I am alone, but when my father come, I am jus' liddle insignificant speck—nothing!”

“Oh, Gozo!”

“Never mind,” he said, with mock seriousness. “Nex' week I goin' sail for America. *Then*, perhaps, you sorry.”

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The tears slipped from Marion's eyes, and she wiped them with the pink sleeve of her kimono.

"Take me with you, dear Gozo!"

"An' me, also."

"An' me, too," cried the two little girls.

"Girls," said Billy, with contempt, "aren't allowed in colleges. You haven't any sense, Marion!"

"Well, b-but I could keep house for Gozo."

"A fine house you'd keep," said her brother, witheringly.

Marion's pride arose. She ignored Billy entirely.

"Gozo," she said, "mother let me do all kinds of work when the servants went."

"Hoom!" grunted Billy, "you used to play at work. Plum Blossom did it all. If you take any *girl*"—he spoke the word with almost Orien-

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tal contempt — “take Plum Blossom.”

The latter smiled gratefully in the direction of her step-brother.

“I goin’ wait till you grow up, Beely. *Then* I keep house for you.”

“You gotter git marry with Takashima Ido,” put in Taro.

“I *nod* got!” cried the little girl, indignantly.

“You *got!*” persisted Taro. “His fadder already speag for you to our fadder.”

“Tha’s jus’ account our fadder becom’ hero. *He* wan’ be in our family also. But I *nod* goin’ marry thad boy all same. He got a small-pox all over his face.”

“Plenty husband got small-pox,” said Taro. “He also got lots money. Mebbe one hundred dollars.”

Plum Blossom pouted.

“I goin’ marry jus’ same my

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mother. Me? I goin' *leave* my husband."

"What's all this talk of husbands?" queried a cheerful voice.

Mr. Kurukawa seated himself among the children. Plum Blossom and Iris found a seat, one on each of his knees. Between them Juji nestled against his father's shoulder. The hand which had rested so contentedly in Gozo's a moment since had become a bit restless. Marion, the fond, showed an inclination again to desert; but Gozo maliciously held her small hand tightly so that she could not escape.

"I want to say something to father," she said.

"Say it to me," said Gozo.

"Yes, but—"

"Hah! Did I not say so? Very well, you love me only sometimes. Tha's not kind love."

She was contrite in a moment, es-

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saying to put her hand back in his, but he waved it away bitterly.

"No, no. Tha's too lade. Never mind. I know one girl never leave me."

"You mean Summer?"

"Summer-san. What a beautiful name!"

Marion turned her back upon him.

"Listen," he said into her little pink ear. "I go alone at America, but after four years I come bag, an' then I goin' tek to America with me—"

"Summer?"

"No."

"Me?"

"No—nod exactly."

"Then *who*, Gozo?"

"All of you."

"Oh, won't that be lovely," she cried. "Father, are we all going to America in four years?"

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He nodded, smiling. "After Gozo graduates."

"An' naever come bag at Japan?" cried Plum Blossom, in a most tragic voice.

"Oh yes, it will be only a visit, perhaps."

"I goin' to die ride away when I cross that west water," averred the little Japanese girl.

"Why," grumbled Billy, "you just now promised you'd be my house-keeper."

"In Japan," said Plum Blossom.

Taro had finished whittling the bamboo arrow he had been industriously fashioning.

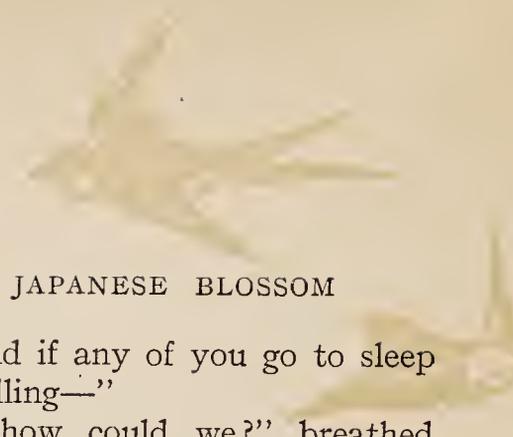
"Pleese, my father, tell now thad story of yourself."

"Yes?"

"Oh do."

All of the children chorussed assent.

"Very well. Now it's a long, long



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story, and if any of you go to sleep in the telling—”

“Oh, how could we?” breathed Marion.

“Very well, then. Come close, all of you.”

They drew in about him, their small, eager faces entranced at once. He smiled about the circle, touched a little head here and there, and then began his tale:

“Once upon a time—”

THE END







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[Babcock, Mrs. Winnifred (Eaton)]

A Japanese blossom

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